



Christian Progress .
by F. W. Robertson



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Christian progress : by oblivion of the
past, and other sermons

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CHRISTIAN PROGRESS

BY

OBLIVION OF THE PAST

AND

OTHER SERMONS.

BY THE

REV. FREDERICK W. ROBERTSON

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CHRISTIAN PROGRESS BY OBLIVION OF THE PAST.

“Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do; forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press towards the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” — *Phil.* iii. 13, 14.

THE first thing which strikes us on reading these verses is that the apostle Paul places himself on a level with the persons whom he addresses. He speaks to them as frail, weak men, and he gives them, in himself, a specimen of what frailty and weakness can achieve in the strength of Christ. And it is for this reason that the passage before us is one of the most encouraging in all the writings of St. Paul. For there is one aspect in which the apostle is presented to us, which is perhaps a depressing one. When we look at his almost superhuman career, reverence and admiration we must feel; but

so far does he seem removed from ordinary life that imitation appears out of the question. Let us select but two instances of this discouraging aspect of the apostle's life. Most of us know the feeling of unaccountable depression which rests upon us when we find ourselves alone in a foreign town, with its tide of population ebbing and flowing past us, a mass of human life, in which we ourselves are nothing. But that was St. Paul's daily existence. He had consecrated himself to an almost perpetual exile. He had given up the endearments of domestic life forever. Home, in this world, St. Paul had none. With a capacity for the tenderest feelings of our nature, he had chosen for his lot the task of living among strangers, and as soon as they ceased to be strangers, quitting them again. He went on month by month, attaching congregations to himself, and month by month dooming himself to severance. And yet I know not that we read of one single trace of depression or discouragement suffered to rest on the apostle's mind. He seems to have been ever fresh and sanguine, the salient energy of his

soul rising above the need of all human sympathy. It is the magnificent spectacle of missionary life, with more than missionary loneliness. There is something almost awful in the thought of a man who was so thoroughly in the next world that he needed not the consolations of this world. And yet, observe, there is nothing encouraging for us in this. It is very grand to look upon, very commanding, very full of awe; but it is so much above us, so little like anything human that we know of, that we content ourselves with gazing on him as on the gliding swallow's flight, which we wonder at, but never think of imitating.

Now let us look at one other feature in St. Paul's character — his superiority to those temptations which are potent with ordinary men. We say nothing of his being above the love of money, of his indifference to a life of comfort and personal indulgence. Those temptations only assail the lower part of our nature, and it is not saintliness to be above these: common excellence is impossible otherwise. But when we come to look for those temptations which

master the higher and the nobler man, — ambition, jealousy, pride, — it is not that we see them conquered by the apostle; they scarcely seem to have even lodged in his bosom at all. It was open to the apostle, if he had felt the ambition to make for himself a name, to become the leader of a party in Corinth and in the world. And yet, remember we not how sternly he put down the thought, and how he labored to merge his individuality in the cause, and make himself an equal of inferior men? “Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers, servants, by whom ye believed?”

Again, in respect of jealousy. Jealousy seems almost inseparable from human love. It is but the other side of love, the shadow cast by the light when the darker body intervenes. There came to him in prison that most cutting of all news to a minister's heart, that others were trying to supplant him in the affections of his converts. But his was that lofty love which cares less for reciprocation than for the well-being of the objects loved. The rival teachers were teaching from emulation; still they could

not but bless by preaching Christ to his disciples. "What then? Notwithstanding every way, whether in pretence or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice." There is not a trace of jealousy in these words.

Once more: degrading things were laid to his charge. The most liberal-minded of mankind was charged with bigotry. The most generous of men was suspected of avarice. If ever pride were venial, it had been then. Yet read through the whole of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians and say if one spark of pride be visible. He might have shut himself up in high and dignified silence. He might have refused to condescend to solicit a renewal of the love which had once grown cold; and yet we look in vain for the symptoms of offended pride. Take this one passage as a specimen: "Behold, this third time I am willing to come unto you; . . . and I will very gladly spend and be spent for you, though the more abundantly I love you, the less I am beloved."

In this there is very little encouragement. A

man so thoroughly above human resentment, human passion, human weakness, does not seem to us an example. The nearer humanity approaches a perfect standard the less does it command our sympathy. A man must be weak before we can feel encouraged to attempt what he has done. It is not the Redeemer's sinlessness, nor his unconquerable fidelity to duty, nor his superhuman nobleness, that wins our desire to imitate. Rather his tears at the grave of friendship, his shrinking from the sharpness of death, and the feeling of human doubt which swept across his soul like a desolation. These make him one of us, and therefore our example.

And it is on this account that this passage seems to us so full of encouragement. It is the precious picture of a frail and struggling apostle, precious both to the man and to the minister. To the man, because it tells him that what he feels St. Paul felt, imperfect, feeble, far from what he would wish to be; yet with sanguine hope, expecting progress in the saintly life. Precious to the minister, because it tells

him that his very weakness may be subservient to a people's strength. Not in his transcendent gifts, not in his saintly endowments, not even in his apostolic devotedness, is St. Paul so close to our hearts, as when he makes himself one with us, and says, "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended."

And we know not how otherwise any minister could hope to do good when he addresses men who are infinitely his superiors in almost every thing. We know not how else he could urge on to a sanctity which he has not himself attained; we know not how he could dare to speak severely of weaknesses by which he himself is overpowered, and passions of which he feels in himself all the terrible tyranny, if it were not that he expects to have tacitly understood *that* in his own case which the apostle urged in every form of expression: Brethren, be as I am, for I am as ye are, struggling, baffled, but panting for emancipation.

We confine ourselves to two subjects.

- I. *The apostle's object in this life.*
- II. *The means which he used for attaining it.*

I. The apostle's object or aim in this life was "perfection." In the verse before, "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect." Perfection was his unreachèd mark.

And less than this no Christian can aim at. There are given to us "exceeding great and precious promises," that by means of these we might be partakers of the Divine Nature. Not merely to be equal to the standard of our day, nor even to surpass it. Not to be superior to the men amongst whom we live. Not to forgive those who have little to be forgiven. Not to love our friends, but to be the children of our Father, to be pure even as Christ is pure, to be "perfect even as our Father which is in heaven is perfect."

It is easily perceivable why this perfection is unattainable in this life. Faultlessness is conceivable, being merely the negation of evil. But perfection is positive, the attainment of all conceivable excellence. It is long as eternity, expansive as God. Perfection is our mark; yet never will the aim be so true and steady as to

strike the golden centre. Perfection of character, yet, even to the dying hour, it will be but this, "I count not myself to have apprehended." Christian life is like those questions in mathematics which never can be exactly answered. All you can attain is an approximation to the truth. You may labor on for years and never reach it; yet your labor is not in vain. Every figure you add makes the fraction nearer than the last to the million-millionth; and so it is with holiness. Christ is our mark, the perfect standard of God in Christ. But be as holy as you will, there is a step nearer, and another, and another, and so infinitely on.

To this object the apostle gave himself with singleness of aim. "*This one thing I do.*" The life of man is a vagrant, changeful desultoriness, like that of children sporting on an enamelled meadow, chasing now a painted butterfly, which loses its charm by being caught; now a wreath of mist, which falls damp upon the hand with disappointment; now a feather of thistle-down, which is crushed in the grasp. In the midst of all this fickleness, St. Paul had found a purpose

to which he gave the undivided energy of his soul. "This one thing I do, I press towards the mark."

This is intelligible enough in the case of a minister; for whether he be in the pulpit or beside a sick man's bed, or furnishing his mind in the study, evidently and unmistakably it is his profession to be doing only one thing. But in the manifold life of the man of the world and business, it is not so easy to understand how this can be carried out. To answer this, we observe there is a difference between doing and being. Perfection is being, not doing; it is not to effect an act, but to achieve a character. If the aim of life were to do something, then, as in an earthly business, except in doing this one thing the business would be at a stand-still. The student is not doing the one thing of student life when he has ceased to think or read. The laborer leaves his work undone when the spade is not in his hand, and he sits beneath the hedge to rest. But in Christian life, every moment and every act is an opportunity for doing the one thing, of *becoming* Christ-like.

Every day is full of a most impressive experience. Every temptation to evil temper which can assail us to-day will be an opportunity to decide the question whether we shall gain the calmness and the rest of Christ, or whether we shall be tossed by the restlessness and agitation of the world. Nay, the very vicissitudes of the seasons, day and night, heat and cold, affecting us variably, and producing exhilaration or depression, are so contrived as to conduce towards the being which we become, and decide whether we shall be masters of ourselves, or whether we shall be swept at the mercy of accident and circumstance, miserably susceptible of merely outward influences. Infinite as are the varieties of life, so manifold are the paths to saintly character; and he who has not found out how directly or indirectly to make everything converge towards his soul's sanctification, has as yet missed the meaning of this life.

In pressing towards this "mark," the apostle attained a prize; and here I offer an observation, which is not one of mere subtlety of refinement, but deeply practical. The mark was

perfection of character, the prize was blessedness. But the apostle did not aim at the prize of blessedness, he aimed at the mark of perfectness. In becoming perfect he attained happiness, but his primary aim was not happiness.

We may understand this by an illustration. In student life there are those who seek knowledge for its own sake, and there are those who seek it for the sake of the prize, and the honor, and the subsequent success in life that knowledge brings. To those who seek knowledge for its own sake the labor is itself reward. Attainment is the highest reward. Doubtless, the prize stimulates exertion; encourages and forms a part of the motive, but only a subordinate one: and knowledge would still have "a price above rubies," if there were no prize at all. They who seek knowledge for the sake of a prize are not genuine lovers of knowledge; they only love the rewards of knowledge: had it no honor or substantial advantage connected with it, they would be indolent.

Applying this to our subject, I say this is a spurious goodness which is good for the sake

of reward. The child that speaks truth for the sake of the praise of truth is not truthful. The man who is honest because honesty is the best policy has not integrity in his heart. He who endeavors to be humble, and holy, and perfect, in order to win heaven, has only a counterfeit religion. God for his own sake; Goodness because it is good; Truth because it is lovely, — this is the Christian's aim. The prize is only an incentive; inseparable from success, but not the aim itself.

With this limitation, however, we remark that it is a Christian duty to dwell much more on the thought of future blessedness than most men do. If ever the apostle's step began to flag, the radiant diadem before him gave new vigor to his heart; and we know how at the close of his career the vision became more vivid and more entrancing. "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of glory!" It is our privilege, if we are on our way to God, to keep steadily before us the thought of home. Make it a matter of habit. Force yourself at night, alone, in the midst of the world's bright sights,

to pause to think of the heaven which is yours. Let it calm you and ennoble you, and give you cheerfulness to endure. It was so that Moses was enabled to live amongst all the fascinations of his courtly life, with a heart unseduced from his laborious destiny. By faith . . . "esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt." Why? "For he had respect unto the recompense of the reward." It was so that our master strengthened his human soul for its sharp earthly endurance. "For the joy that was set before him, He endured the cross, despising the shame." If we would become heavenly-minded, we must let the imagination realize the blessedness to which we are moving on. Let us think much of rest, —the rest which is not of indolence, but of powers in perfect equilibrium. The rest which is deep as summer midnight, yet full of life and force as summer sunshine, the sabbath of eternity. Let us think of the love of God, which we shall feel in its full tide upon our souls. Let us think of that marvellous career of sublime occupation which shall belong to the spirits

of just men made perfect; when we shall fill a higher place in God's universe, and more consciously, and, with more distinct insight, co-operate with God in the rule over his creation. "I press towards the mark, for the prize."

II. We pass to our second topic,—the means which St. Paul found available for the attainment of divine and perfect character. His great principle was to "forget the things which were behind, and to reach forward to the things which were before." The wisdom of a divine life lies hid in this principle. I shall endeavor to expand the sentiment to make it intelligible.

What are the things behind, which are to be forgotten?

I. If we would progress in Christian life, we must forget the days of innocence that lie behind us. Let not this be misunderstood. Innocent, literally, no man ever is. We come into the world with tendencies to evil; but there was a time in our lives when those were only tendencies. A proneness to sin we had; but we had not yet sinned. The moment had not yet arrived when that cloud settles down upon

the heart, which in all of after-life is never entirely removed, — the sense of guilt, the anguish of lost innocence, the restless feeling of a heart no longer pure. Popularly, we call that innocence; and when men become bitterly aware that early innocence of heart is gone, they feel as if all were lost, and so look back to what they reckon holier days with a peculiar fondness of regret. I believe there is much that is merely feeble and sentimental in this regret. Our early innocence is nothing more than ignorance of evil. Christian life is not a retaining of that ignorance of evil, nor even a returning of it again. We lose our mere negative sinlessness. We put on a firm manly holiness. Human innocence is not to know evil; Christian saintliness is to know evil and good, and prefer good. It is possible for a parent, with over-fastidious refinement, to prolong the duration of this innocence unnaturally. He may lock up his library, and prevent the entrance to forbidden books; he may exercise a jealous censorship over every book and every companion that comes into the house; he may remove the public journal from

the table, lest an eye may chance to rest upon the contaminating portion of its pages ; but he has only put off the evil hour. He has sent into the world a young man of eighteen or twenty, ignorant of evil as a child, but not innocent as an angel who abhors the evil. No ; we cannot get back our past ignorance, neither is it desirable we should. No sane mind wishes for that which is impossible. And it is no more to be regretted than the blossom is to be regretted when fruit is hardening in its place ; no more to be regretted than the slender gracefulness of the sapling, when you have got instead the woody fibre of the heart of oak of which the ship is made ; no more to be regretted than the green blade when the ear has come instead, bending down in yellow ripeness. Our innocence is gone, withered with the business-like contact with the great world. It is one of the things behind. Forget it. It was worth very little. And now for something of a texture more firm, more enduring. We will not mourn over the loss of simplicity, if we have got, instead, souls indurated by experience, disciplined,

even by fall, to refuse the evil and to choose the good.

2. In the next place, it is wise to forget our days of youth. Up to a certain period of life it is the tendency of man to look forward. There is a marvellous prodigality with which we throw away our present happiness when we are young, which belongs to those who feel that they are rich in happiness, and never expect to be bankrupts. It almost seems one of the signatures of our immortality that we squander time as if there were a dim consciousness that we are in possession of an eternity of it; but as we arrive at middle age, it is the tendency of man to look back.

To a man of middle life, existence is no longer a dream, but a reality. He has not much more new to look forward to, for the character of his life is generally fixed by that time. His profession, his home, his occupations, will be for the most part what they are now. He will make few new acquaintances, no new friends. It is the solemn thought connected with middle age that life's last business is begun in earnest; and it is then, midway between the cradle and the

grave, that a man begins to look back and marvel with a kind of remorseful feeling that he let the days of youth go by so half enjoyed. It is the pensive autumn feeling, it is the sensation of half sadness that we experience when the longest day of the year is past, and every day that follows is shorter, and the lights fainter, and the feebler shadows tell that nature is hastening with gigantic footsteps to her winter grave. So does man look back upon his youth. When the first gray hairs become visible, when the unwelcome truth fastens itself upon the mind that a man is no longer going up the hill, but down, and that the sun is already westering, he looks back on things behind. Now this is a natural feeling, but is it the high Christian tone of feeling? In the spirit of this verse, we may assuredly answer, No. We who have an inheritance, incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, what have we to do with things past? When we were children, we thought as children. But now there lies before us manhood, with its earnest work; and then old age, and then the grave, and then home.

And so manhood in the Christian life is a better thing than boyhood, because it is a riper thing; and old age ought to be a brighter, and a calmer, and a more serene thing than manhood. There is a second youth for man, better and holier than his first, if he will look on and not back. There is a peculiar simplicity of heart and a touching singleness of purpose in Christian old age, which has ripened gradually and not fitfully. It is then that to the wisdom of the serpent is added the harmlessness of the dove; it is then that to the firmness of manhood is joined almost the gentleness of womanhood; it is then that the somewhat austere and sour character of growing strength, moral and intellectual, mellows into the rich ripeness of an old age made sweet and tolerant by experience; it is then that man returns to first principles. There comes a love more pure and deep than the boy could ever feel; there comes a conviction, with a strength beyond that, which the boy could never know, that the earliest lesson of life is infinite, Christ is all.

3. Again, it is wise to forget past errors. There is a kind of temperament which, when indulged, greatly hinders growth in real godliness. It is that rueful, repentant, self-accusing temper which is always looking back, and microscopically observing how that which is done might have been better done. Something of this we ought to have. A Christian ought to feel always that he has partially failed, but that ought not to be the only feeling. Faith ought ever to be a sanguine, cheerful thing; and perhaps in practical life we could not give a better account of faith than by saying that it is, amidst much failure, having the heart to *try again*. Our best deeds are marked by imperfection; but if they really were our best, "forget the things that are behind," we shall do better next time.

Under this head we include all those mistakes which belong to our circumstances. We can all look back to past life and see mistakes that have been made, to a certain extent, perhaps, irreparable ones. We can see where our education was fatally misdirected. The profes-

sion chosen for you, perhaps, was not the fittest, or you are out of place, and many things might have been better ordered. Now on this apostolic principle it is wise to forget all that. It is not by regretting what is irreparable that true work is to be done, but by making the best of what we are. It is not by complaining that we have not the right tools, but by using well the tools we have. What we are and where we are is God's providential arrangement—God's doing, though it may be man's misdoing; and the manly and the wise way is to look your disadvantages in the face, and see what can be made out of them. Life, like war, is a series of mistakes, and he is not the best Christian nor the best general who makes the fewest false steps. Poor mediocrity may secure that; but he is the best who wins the most splendid victories by the retrieval of mistakes. Forget mistakes: organize victory out of mistakes.

Finally, past guilt lies behind us, and is well forgotten. There is a way in which even sin may be banished from the memory. If a man

looks forward to the evil he is going to commit, and satisfies himself that it is inevitable, and so treats it lightly, he is acting as a fatalist. But if a man partially does this, looking backward, feeling that sin when it is past has become part of the history of God's universe, and is not to be wept over forever, he only does that which the Giver of the Gospel permits him to do. Bad as the results have been in the world of making light of sin, those of brooding over it too much have been worse. Remorse has done more harm than even hardihood. It was remorse which fixed Judas in an unalterable destiny; it was remorse which filled the monasteries for ages with men and women whose lives became useless to their fellow creatures; it is remorse which so remembers by-gone faults as to paralyze the energies for doing Christ's work; for when you break a Christian's spirit, it is all over with progress. Oh, we want every thing that is hopeful and encouraging for our work, for God knows it is not an easy one. And therefore it is that the Gospel comes to the guiltiest of us all

at the very outset with the inspiring news of pardon. You remember how Christ treated sin, — sin of oppression and hypocrisy indig-
nantly, but sin of frailty, — “ ‘Hath no man condemned thee?’ ‘No man, Lord.’ ‘Neither do I condemn thee; go, and sin no more,’ ” — as if he would bid us think more of what we may be than of what we have been.

There was the wisdom of life in the proverb with which the widow of Tekoah pleaded for the restoration of Absalom from banishment before David. Absalom had slain his brother Amnon. Well, Amnon was dead before his time; but the severity of revenge could never bring him back again. “We must all die,” said the wise woman, “and are as water spilt upon the ground, which cannot be gathered up again.” Christian brethren, *do not stop too long to weep over spilt water*. Forget your guilt, and wait to see what eternity has to say to it. You have other work to do now.

So let us work out the spirit of the apostle’s plan. Innocence, youth, success, error, guilt, — let us forget them all.

Not backward are our glances bent,
But onward to our Father's home.

In conclusion, remember Christian progress is only possible in Christ. It is a very lofty thing to be a Christian, for a Christian is a man who is restoring God's likeness to his character, and therefore the apostle calls it here a high calling. High as heaven is the calling where-with we are called. But this very height makes it seem impracticable. It is natural to say, All that was well enough for one so transcendently gifted as Paul to hope for: but I am no gifted man; I have no iron strength of mind; I have no sanguine hopefulness of character; I am disposed to look on the dark side of things; I am undetermined, weak, vacillating; and then I have a whole army of passions and follies to contend with. We have to remind such men of one thing they have forgotten. It is the high calling of God, if you will; but it is the high calling of God in Christ Jesus. What the world calls virtue is a name and a dream without Christ. The foundation of all human excellence must be laid deep in the blood of the

Redeemer's cross, and in the power of His Resurrection. First let a man know that all his past is wrong and sinful; then let him fix his eye on the love of God in Christ loving him, even him, the guilty one. Is there no strength in that—no power in the knowledge that all that is gone by *is gone*, and that a fresh, clear future is open? It is not the progress of virtue, that God asks for, but progress in saintliness empowered by hope and love.

Lastly, let each man put this question to himself, "Dare I look on?" With an earnest Christian, it is "reaching forth to those things which are before," — progress ever. And then just as we go to rest in this world tired, and wake up fresh and vigorous in the morning, so does the Christian go to sleep in the world's night, weary with the work of life, and then on the resurrection-day he wakes in his second and his brighter morning. It is well for a believer to look on. Dare you? Remember, out of Christ, it is not wisdom, but madness to look on. You must look back, for the longest and the best day is either past or passing. It will

be winter soon — desolate, uncheered, hopeless winter; old age, with its dreariness and its disappointments, and its querulous broken-heartedness; and there is no second spring for you, no resurrection-morning of blessedness to dawn on the darkness of your grave. God has only one method of salvation, the Cross of Christ. God can have only one; for the Cross of Christ means death to evil, life to good. There is no other way to salvation but that; for that in itself is, and alone is, salvation. Out of Christ, therefore, it is woe to the man who reaches forth to the things which are before. To such I say, My unhappy brethren, Omnipotence itself cannot change the darkness of your destiny.

THE RESTORATION OF THE ERRING.

“Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual restore such a one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.” — *Gal.* vi. 1, 2.

IT would be a blessed thing for our Christian society if we could contemplate sin from the same point of view from which Christ and his apostles saw it. But in this matter society is ever oscillating between two extremes,—undue laxity and undue severity.

In one age of the Church—the days of Donatism, for instance—men refuse the grace of repentance to those who have erred, holding that baptismal privileges once forfeited cannot be got back; that for a single distinct lapse there is no restoration.

In another age, the Church, having found out its error, and discovered the danger of setting up an impossible standard, begins to confer

periodical absolutions and plenary indulgences, until sin, easily forgiven, is as easily committed.

And so, too, with societies and legislatures. In one period Puritanism is dominant and morals severe. There are no small faults. The statute-book is defiled with the red mark of blood, set opposite innumerable misdemeanors. In an age still earlier the destruction of a wild animal is punished like the murder of a man. Then in another period we have such a medley of sentiments and sickness that we have lost all our bearings, and cannot tell what is vice and what is goodness. Charity and toleration degenerate into that feeble dreaminess which refuses to be roused by stern views of life.

This contrast, too, may exist in the same age, nay, in the same individual. One man gifted with talent, or privileged by rank, outrages all decency; the world smiles, calls it eccentricity, forgives, and is very merciful and tolerant. Then some one, unshielded by these advantages, endorsed neither by wealth nor birth, sins—not to one tenth, nor one ten-thousandth part of the same extent: society is seized with a

virtuous indignation, rises up in wrath, asks what is to become of the morals of the community if these things are committed, and protects its proprieties by a rigorous exclusion of the offender, cutting off the bridge behind him against his return forever.

Now the divine character of the New Testament is shown in nothing more signally than in the stable ground from which it views this matter, in comparison with the shifting and uncertain standing-point from whence the world sees it. It says, never retracting nor bating, "The wages of sin is death." It speaks sternly, with no weak sentiment, "Go, sin no more, lest a worse thing happen unto thee." But then it accepts every excuse, admits every palliation; looks upon this world of temptation and these frail human hearts of ours, not from the cell of a monk, or the study of a recluse, but in a large, real way; accepts the existence of sin as a fact, without affecting to be shocked or startled; assumes that it must needs be that offences come, and deals with them in a large noble way, as the results of a disease which

must be met—which should be, and which can be, cured.

I. *The Christian view of other men's sin.*

II. *The Christian power of restoration.*

I. The first thing noticeable in the apostle's view of sin is, that he looks upon it as if it might be sometimes the result of a surprise. "If a man be overtaken in a fault." In the original it is *anticipated, taken suddenly in front*. As if circumstances had been beforehand with the man; as if sin, supposed to be left far behind, had on a sudden got in front, tripped him up, or led him into ambush.

All sins are not of this character. There are some which are in accordance with the general bent of our disposition, and the opportunity of committing them was only the first occasion for manifesting what was in the heart; so that if they had not been committed then, they probably would or must have been at some other time; and looking back to them we have no right to lay the blame on circumstances—we are to accept the penalty as a severe warning meant to show what was in our hearts.

There are other sins of a different character. It seems as if it were not in us to commit them. They were, so to speak, unnatural to us; you were going quietly on your way, thinking no evil; suddenly temptation, for which you were not prepared, presented itself, and before you knew where you were, you were in the dust, fallen.

As, for instance, when a question is suddenly put to a man which never ought to have been put, touching a secret of his own or another's. Had he the presence of mind or adroitness, he might turn it aside, or refuse to reply. But being unprepared and accosted suddenly, he says hastily that which is irreconcilable with strict truth; then, to substantiate and make it look probable, misrepresents or invents something else; and so he has woven round himself a mesh which will entangle his conscience through many a weary day and many a sleepless night.

It is shocking, doubtless, to allow ourselves even to admit that this is possible; yet no one knowing human nature from men, and not from

books, will deny that this might befall even a brave and true man. St. Peter was both; yet this was his history. In a crowd, suddenly, the question was put directly, "This man also was with Jesus of Nazareth." Then came a prevarication — a lie; and yet another. This was a sin of surprise. He was overtaken in a fault.

Every one of us admits the truth of this in his own case. Looking back to past life, he feels that the errors which have most terribly determined his destiny were the result of mistake. Inexperience, a hasty promise, excess of trust, incaution, nay, even a generous devotion, have been fearfully and, as it seems to us, inadequately chastised. There may be some undue tenderness to ourselves when we thus palliate the past; still, a great part of such extenuation is only justice.

Now the Bible simply requires that we should judge others by the same rule by which we judge ourselves. The law of Christ demands that what we plead in our own case, we should admit in the case of others. Believe that in this or that case which you judge so harshly,

the heart, in its deeps, did not consent to sin, nor by preference love what is hateful; simply admit that such an one may have been overtaken in a fault. This is the large law of charity.

1. Again, the apostle considers fault as that which has left a burden on the erring spirit. "Bear ye one another's burdens."

For we cannot say to the laws of God, I was overtaken. We live under stern and unrelenting laws which permit no excuse, and never heard of a surprise. They never send a man who has failed once back to try a second chance. There is no room for a mistake; you play against them for your life, and they exact the penalty inexorably, "Every man must bear his own burden." Every law has its own appropriate penalty; and the wonder of it is, that often the severest penalty seems set against the smallest transgression. We suffer more for our vices than our crimes; we pay dearer for our imprudences than even for our deliberate wickedness.

Let us examine this a little more closely. One burden laid on fault is that chain of en-

tanglement which seems to drag down to fresh sins. One step necessitates many others. One fault leads to another, and crime to crime. The soul gravitates downward beneath its burden. It was profound knowledge indeed which prophetically refused to limit Peter's sin to once. "Verily I say unto thee . . . thou shalt deny Me thrice."

We will try to describe that sense of burden. A fault has the power sometimes of distorting life till all seems hideous and unnatural. A man who has left his proper nature, and seems compelled to say and do things unnatural and in false show, who has thus become untrue to himself, to him life and the whole universe becomes untrue. He can grasp nothing; he does not stand on fact; he is living as in a dream—himself a dream. All is ghastly, unreal, spectral. A burden is on him as of a nightmare. He moves about in nothingness and shadows, as if he were not. His own existence swiftly passing might seem a phantom life, were it not for the corroding pang of anguish in his soul, for that at least is real!

2. Add to this, the burden of the heart weighing on itself.

It has been truly said that the human heart is like the millstone which, if there be wheat beneath it, will grind to purposes of health; if not, will grind still, at the will of the wild wind, but on itself. So does the heart wear out itself against its own thought. One fixed idea — one remembrance, and no other — one stationary, wearing anguish. This is remorse passing into despair; itself the goad to fresh and wilder crimes.

The worst of such a burden is that it keeps down the soul from good. Many an ethereal spirit, which might have climbed the heights of holiness, and breathed the rare and difficult air of the mountain-top, where the heavenliest spirituality alone can live, is weighed down by such a burden to the level of the lowest. If you know such an one, mark his history; without restoration, his career is done. That soul will not grow henceforth.

3. The burden of a secret.

Some here know the weight of an uncom-

municated sin. They know how it lies like ice upon the heart. They know how dreadful a thing the sense of hypocrisy is; the knowledge of inward depravity, while all without looks pure as snow to men.

How heavy this weight may be, we gather from these indications. First, from this strange, psychological fact: A man with a guilty secret will tell out the tale of his crimes as under the personality of another; a mysterious necessity seems to force him to give it utterance — as in the old fable of him who breathed out his weighty secret to the reeds. A remarkable instance of this is afforded in the case of that murderer, who, from the richness of his gifts and the enormity of his crime, is almost a historical personage, who, having become a teacher of youth, was in the habit of narrating to his pupils the anecdote of his crime with all the circumstantial particularity of fact, but all the while under the guise of a pretended dream. Such men tread forever on the very verge of a confession; they seem to take a fearful pleasure in talking of their guilt, as if the heart could

not bear its own burden, but must give it *outness*.

Again, is it evidenced by the attempt to get relief in profuse and general acknowledgments of guilt. They adopt the language of religion; they call themselves "vile dust and miserable sinners." The world takes generally what they mean particularly. But they get no relief, they only deceive themselves; for they have turned the truth itself into a falsehood, using true words which they know convey a false impression, and getting praise for humility instead of punishment for guilt. They have used all the effort and suffered all the pang which it would have cost them to get real relief, and they have not got it; and the burden unacknowledged remains a burden still.

The third indication we have of the heaviness of this burden is the commonness of the longing for confession. None but a minister of the Gospel can estimate this; he only who, looking round his congregation, can point to person after person whose wild tale of guilt or sorrow he is cognizant of; who can remember how

often similar griefs were trembling upon lips which did not unburden themselves; whose heart, being the receptacle of the anguish of many, can judge what is in human hearts,—he alone can estimate how much there is of sin and crime lying with the weight and agony of concealment on the spirits of our brethren.

The fourth burden is an intuitive consciousness of the hidden sins of others' hearts.

To two states of soul it is given to detect the presence of evil, states the opposite of each other—innocence and guilt.

It was predicted of the Saviour, while yet a child, that by him the thoughts of many hearts should be revealed; the fulfilment of this was the history of his life. He went through the world, by his innate purity detecting the presence of evil, as he detected the touch of her who touched his garment in the crowd.

Men, supposed spotless before, fell down before him, crying, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" This, in a lower degree, is true of all innocence. You would think that one who can deeply read the human

heart and track its windings must be himself deeply experienced in evil. But it is not so — at least not always. Purity can detect the presence of the evil which it does not understand, just as the dove which has never seen a hawk trembles at its presence; and just as the horse rears uneasily when the wild beast unknown and new to it is near; so innocence understands, yet understands not, the meaning of the unholy look, the guilty tone, the sinful manner. It shudders and shrinks from it by a power given to it, like that which God has conferred on the unreasoning mimosa. Sin gives the same power, but differently. Innocence apprehends the approach of evil by the instinctive tact of contrast; guilt, by the instinctive consciousness of similarity. It is the profound truth contained in the history of the Fall. The eyes are opened; the knowledge of good and evil has come. The soul knows its own nakedness, but it knows also the nakedness of all other souls which have sinned after the similitude of its own sin.

Very marvellous is that test-power of guilt;

it is vain to think of eluding its fine capacity of penetration. Intimations of evil are perceived and noted, when to other eyes all seems pure. The dropping of an eye, the shunning of a subject, the tremulousness of a tone, the peculiarity of a subterfuge, will tell the tale. "These are tendencies like mine, and here is a spirit conscious as my own is conscious."

This dreadful burden the Scriptures call the knowledge of good and evil; can we not all remember the salient sense of happiness which we had when all was innocent, when crime was the tale of some far distant hemisphere, and the guilt we heard of was not suspected in the hearts of the beings around us? And can we not recollect, too, how by our own sin, or the cognizance of others' sin, there came a something which hung the heavens with shame and guilt, and all around seemed laden with evil? This is the worst burden that comes from transgression: loss of faith in human goodness; the being sentenced to go through life haunted with a presence from which we cannot escape; the presence of evil in the hearts of all that we approach.

II. The Christian power of restoration: "Ye which are spiritual, restore such an one."

First, then, restoration is possible. That is a Christian fact. Moralists have taught us what sin is; they have explained how it twines itself into habit; they have shown us its ineffaceable character. It was reserved for Christianity to speak of restoration. Christ, and Christ only, has revealed that he who has erred may be restored, and made pure and clean and whole again.

Next, however, observe that this restoration is accomplished by men. Causatively, of course, and, immediately, restoration is the work of Christ and of God the Spirit. Mediate and instrumentally, it is the work of men. "*Brethren*, . . . restore such an one." God has given to man the power of elevating his brother man. He has conferred on his Church the power of the keys to bind and loose, "Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained." It is therefore in the power of man, by his conduct, to restore his brother, or to

hinder his restoration. He may loose him from his sins, or retain their power upon his soul.

Now the words of the text confine us to two modes in which this is done: by sympathy and by forgiveness. "Bear ye one another's burdens."

By sympathy. We Protestants have one unvarying sneer ready for the system of the Romish confessional. They confess, we say, for the sake of absolution, that absolved, they may sin again. A shallow, superficial sneer, as all sneers are. In that craving of the heart which gives the system of the confessional its dangerous power, there is something far more profound than any sneer can fathom. It is not the desire to sin again that makes men long to unburden their conscience, but it is the yearning to be true, which lies at the bottom, even of the most depraved hearts, to appear what they are, and to lead a false life no longer; and besides this, it is the desire of sympathy. For this comes out of that dreadful sense of loneliness which is the result of sinning; the heart, severed from God, feels severed from all other hearts,

goes alone as if it had neither part nor lot with other men, itself a shadow among shadows. And its craving is for sympathy; it wants some human heart to know what it feels. Thousands upon thousands of laden hearts around us are crying, Come and bear my burden with me; and observe here, the apostle says, "Bear ye one another's burdens." Nor let the priest bear the burdens of all; that were most unjust. Why should the priest's heart be the common receptacle of all the crimes and wickedness of a congregation? "Bear ye *one another's* burdens."

Again, by forgiveness. There is a truth in the doctrine of absolution. God has given to man the power to absolve his brother, and so restore him to himself. The forgiveness of man is an echo and an earnest of God's forgiveness. He whom society has restored realizes the possibility of restoration to God's favor. Even the mercifulness of one good man sounds like a voice of pardon from heaven, just as the power and the exclusion of men sound like a knell of hopelessness, and do actually bind the

sin upon the soul. The man whom society will not forgive nor restore is driven into recklessness. This is the true Christian doctrine of absolution, as expounded by the apostle Paul, 2 Cor. ii. 7-10: the degrading power of severity, the restoring power of pardon, vested in the Christian community, the voice of the minister being but their voice.

Now, then, let us inquire into the Christianity of our society. Restoration is the essential work of Christianity. The Gospel is the declaration of God's sympathy and God's pardon. In these two particulars, then, what is our right to be called a Christian community?

Suppose that a man is overtaken in a fault. What does he or what shall he do? Shall he retain it unacknowledged, or go through life a false man? God forbid. Shall he then acknowledge it to his brethren, that they by sympathy and merciful caution may restore him? Well, but is it not certain that it is exactly from those to whom the name of "brethren" most peculiarly belongs that he will not receive assistance? Can a man in mental doubt go to the

members of the same religious communion? Does he not know that they precisely are the ones who will frown upon his doubts, and proclaim his sins? Will a clergyman unburden his mind to his brethren in the ministry? Are they not in their official rigor the least capable of largely understanding him? If a woman be overtaken in a fault, will she tell it to a sister-woman? Or does she not feel instinctively that her sister-woman is ever the most harsh, the most severe, and the most ferocious judge?

Well, you sneer at the confessional; you complain that mistaken ministers of the Church of England are restoring it amongst us. But who are they that are forcing on the confessional? Who drive laden and broken hearts to pour out their long pent-up sorrows into an ear that will receive them? I say it is we: we by our uncharitableness; we by our want of sympathy and unmerciful behavior; we by the unchristian way in which we break down the bridge behind the penitent, and say, "On, on in sin — there is no returning."

Finally, the apostle tells us the spirit in which

this is to be done, and assigns a motive for the doing of it. The mode is, "in the spirit of meekness." For Satan cannot cast out Satan. Sin cannot drive out sin. For instance, my anger cannot drive out another man's covetousness; my petulance or sneer cannot expel another's extravagance. The meekness of Christ alone has power. The charity which desires another's goodness above his well-being, that alone succeeds in the work of restoration.

The motive is, "considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted." For sin is the result of inclination or weakness, combined with opportunity. It is therefore in a degree the offspring of circumstances. Go to the hulks, the jail, the penitentiary, the penal colony; statistics will almost mark out for you beforehand the classes which have furnished the inmates, and the exact proportion of the delinquency of each class. You will not find the wealthy there, nor the noble, nor those guarded by the fences of social life, but the poor, and the uneducated, and the frail, and the defenceless. Can you gravely surmise that this regular tabulation depends upon

the superior virtue of one class compared with others? Or must you admit that the majority at least of those who have not fallen are safe because they were not tempted? Well, then, when St. Paul says, "considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted," it is as if he had written, Proud Pharisee of a man, complacent in thine integrity, who thankest God that thou art "not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, or as this publican," hast thou gone through the terrible ordeal and come off with unscathed virtue? Or art thou in all these points simply untried? Proud Pharisee of a woman, who passest by an erring sister with a haughty look of conscious superiority, dost thou know what temptation is, with strong feeling and mastering opportunity? Shall the rich-cut crystal which stands on the table of the wealthy man, protected from dust and injury, boast that it has escaped the flaws, and the cracks, and the fractures which the earthen jar has sustained, exposed and subjected to rough and general uses? Oh, man or woman! thou who wouldst be a Pharisee, consider, oh consider thyself, lest thou also be tempted.

THE PRODIGAL AND HIS BROTHER.

“And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad: for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again; and was lost, and is found.”—*Luke* xv. 31, 32.

THERE are two classes of sins. There are some sins by which man crushes, wounds, malevolently injures his brother man; those sins which speak of a bad, tyrannical, and selfish heart. Christ met those with denunciation. There are other sins by which a man injures himself. There is a life of reckless indulgence; there is a career of yielding to ungovernable propensities, which most surely conducts to wretchedness and ruin, but makes a man an object of compassion rather than of condemnation.

The reception which sinners of this class met from Christ was marked by strange and pitying

mercy. There was no maudlin sentiment on his lips. He called sin sin, and guilt guilt. But yet there were sins which his lips scourged, and others over which, containing in themselves their own scourge, his heart bled. That which was melancholy and marred and miserable in this world was more congenial to the heart of Christ than that which was proudly happy. It was in the midst of a triumph, and all the pride of a procession, that he paused to weep over ruined Jerusalem. And if we ask the reason why the character of Christ was marked by this melancholy condescension, it is that he was in the midst of a world of ruins, and there was nothing there to gladden, but very much to touch with grief. He was here to restore that which was broken down and crumbling into decay. An enthusiastic antiquarian, standing amidst the fragments of an ancient temple surrounded by dust and moss, broken pillar, and defaced architrave, with magnificent projects in his mind of restoring all this to *former* majesty, to draw out to light from mere rubbish the ruined glories, and therefore stooping down amongst the dank

ivy and the rank nettles; such was Christ amidst the wreck of human nature. He was striving to lift it out of its degradation. He was searching out in revolting places that which had fallen down, that he might build it up again in fair proportions, a holy temple to the Lord.

Therefore he labored among the guilty; therefore he was the companion of outcasts; therefore he spoke tenderly and lovingly to those whom society counted undone; therefore he loved to bind up the bruised and the broken-hearted; therefore his breath fanned the spark which seemed dying out in the wick of the expiring taper, when men thought that it was too late, and that the hour of *hopeless* profligacy was come. It was that feature in his character, that tender, hoping, encouraging spirit of his which the prophet Isaiah fixed upon as a characteristic. "A bruised reed will he not break."

It was an illustration of this spirit which he gave in the parable which forms the subject of our consideration to-day. We find the occasion which drew it from him in the commencement of this chapter, "Then drew near unto

him all the publicans and sinners for to hear him. And the Pharisees and Scribes murmured, saying, This man receiveth sinners and eateth with them." It was then that Christ condescended to offer an excuse or an explanation of his conduct. And his excuse was this: It was natural, humanly natural, to rejoice more over that which has been recovered than over that which has been never lost. He proved that by three illustrations taken from human life. The first illustration intended to show the feelings of Christ in winning back a sinner, was the joy which the shepherd feels in the recovery of a sheep from the mountain wilderness. The second was the satisfaction which a person feels for a recovered coin. The last was the gladness which attends the restoration of an erring son.

Now the three parables are alike in this, that they all describe more or less vividly the feelings of the Redeemer on the recovery of the lost. But the third parable differs from the other two in this, that besides the feelings of the Saviour, it gives us a multitude of particu-

lars respecting the feelings, the steps, and the motives of the penitent who is reclaimed back to goodness. In the first two the thing lost is a coin or a sheep. It would not be possible to find any picture of remorse or gladness there. But in the third parable the thing lost is not a lifeless thing, nor a mute thing, but a being, the workings of whose human heart are all described; so that the subject opened out to us is a more extensive one—not merely the feelings of the finder, God in Christ, but besides that, the sensations of the wanderer himself.

In dealing with this parable, this is the line which we shall adopt. We shall look at the picture which it draws of (1) God's treatment of the penitent; (2) God's expostulation with the saint. God's treatment of the penitent divides itself in this parable into three distinct epochs,—the period of alienation, the period of repentance, and the circumstances of a penitent reception. We shall consider all these in turn.

The first truth exhibited in this parable is the alienation of man's heart from God. Home-

lessness, distance from our Father—that is man's state by nature in this world. The youngest son gathered all together and took his journey into a *far* country. Brethren, this is the history of worldliness. It is a far state from God; in other words, it is a state of homelessness. And now let us ask what that means. To English hearts it is not necessary to expound elaborately the infinite meanings which cluster around that blessed expression, "home." Home is the one place in all this world where hearts are sure of each other. It is the place of confidence. It is the place where we tear off that mask of guarded and suspicious coldness which the world forces us to wear in self-defence, and where we pour out the unreserved communications of full and confiding hearts. It is the spot where expressions of tenderness gush out without any sensation of awkwardness and without any dread of ridicule. Let a man travel where he will, home is the place to which "his heart untravelled fondly turns." He is to double all pleasure there. He is there to divide all pain. A *happy home* is the single spot

of rest which a man has upon this earth for the cultivation of his noblest sensibilities.

And now, my brethren, if that be the description of home, is God's place of rest your home? Walk abroad and alone by night. That awful other world in the stillness and the solemn deep of the eternities above, is it your home? Those graves that lie beneath you, holding in them the infinite secret, and stamping upon all earthly loveliness the mark of frailty and change and fleetingness, — are those graves the prospect to which in bright days and dark days you can turn without dismay? God in his splendors — dare we feel with him affectionate and familiar, so that trial comes softened by this feeling, it is my Father, and enjoyment can be taken with a frank feeling; my Father has given it me, without grudging, to make me happy? All that is having a home in God. Are we at home there? Why, there is demonstration in our very childhood that we are not at home with that other world of God's. An infant fears to be alone, because he feels he is not alone. He trembles in the dark, because he is con-

scious of the presence of the world of spirits. Long before he has been told tales of terror, there is an instinctive dread of the supernatural in the infant mind. It is the instinct which we have from childhood that gives us the feeling of another world. And mark, brethren, if the child is not at home in the thought of that world of God's, the deep of darkness and eternity is around him; God's home, but not his home, for his flesh creeps. And that feeling grows through life; not the fear—when the child becomes a man he gets over fear—but the dislike. The man feels as much aversion as the child for the world of spirits.

Sunday comes. It breaks across the current of his worldliness. It suggests thoughts of death and judgment and everlasting existence. Is that home? Can the worldly man feel Sunday like a foretaste of his Father's mansion? If we could but know how many have come here to-day, not to have their souls lifted up heavenward, but from curiosity, or idleness, or criticism, it would give us an appalling estimate of the number who are living in a far country,

“having no hope, and without God in the world.”

The second truth conveyed to us in this parable is the unsatisfying nature of worldly happiness. The outcast son tried to satiate his appetite with husks. A husk is an empty thing; it is a thing which looks extremely like food, and promises as much as food, but it is not food. It is a thing which when chewed will stay the appetite, but leaves the emaciated body without nourishment. Earthly happiness is a husk. We say not that there is no satisfaction in the pleasures of a worldly life. That would be an over-statement of the truth. Something there is, or else why should men persist in living for them? The cravings of man's appetite may be stayed by things which cannot satisfy him. Every new pursuit contains in it a new hope; and it is long before hope is bankrupt. But, my brethren, it is strange if a man has not found out, long before he has reached the age of thirty, that everything here is empty and disappointing. The nobler his heart and the more unquenchable his hunger for the high

and the good, the sooner will he find that out. Bubble after bubble bursts, each bubble tinted with the celestial colors of the rainbow, and each leaving in the hand which crushes it a cold damp drop of disappointment. All that is described in Scripture by the emphatic metaphor of "sowing the wind and reaping the whirlwind," the whirlwind of blighted hopes and unreturned feelings and crushed expectations, — that is the harvest which the world gives you to reap.

And now is the question asked, Why is this world unsatisfying? Brethren, it is the grandeur of the soul which God has given us which makes it insatiable in its desires, with an infinite void which cannot be filled up. A soul which was made for God, how can the world fill it? If the ocean can be still with miles of unstable waters beneath it, then the soul of man, rocking itself upon its own deep longings, with the Infinite beneath it, may rest. We were created once in majesty to find enjoyment in God, and if our hearts are empty now, there is nothing for it but to fill up the hollowness of the soul with God.

Let not that expression, filling the soul with God, pass away without a distinct meaning. God is love and goodness. Fill the soul with goodness, and fill the soul with love, *that* is the filling it with God. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us. There is nothing else that can satisfy. So that when we hear men of this world acknowledge, as they sometimes will do, when they are wearied with this phantom chase of life, sick of gayeties and tired of toil, that it is not in their pursuits that they can drink the fount of blessedness; and when we see them, instead of turning aside either broken-hearted or else made wise, still persisting to trust to expectations — at fifty, sixty, or seventy years, still feverish about some new plan of ambition — what we see is this: we see a soul formed with a capacity for high and noble things, fit for the banquet-table of God himself, trying to fill its infinite hollowness with husks.

Once more: there is degradation in the life of irreligion. The things which the wanderer tried to live on were not husks only. They were husks which the swine did eat. Degra-

dation means the application of a thing to purposes lower than that for which it was intended. It is degradation to a man to live on husks, because these are not his true food. We call it degradation when we see the members of an ancient family, decayed by extravagance, working for their bread. It is not degradation for a born laborer to work for an honest livelihood. It is degradation for them, for they are not what they might have been. And, therefore, for a man to be degraded, it is not necessary that he should have given himself up to low and mean practices. It is quite enough that he is living for purposes lower than those for which God intended him. He may be a man of unblemished reputation, and yet debased in the truest meaning of the word. We were sent into this world to love God and to love man; to do good, to fill up life with deeds of generosity and usefulness; and he that refuses to work out that high destiny is a degraded man. He may turn away revolted from everything that is gross. His sensuous indulgences may be all marked by refinement and taste. His house may be

filled with elegance. His library may be adorned with books. There may be the sounds in his mansion which can regale the ear, the delicacies which can stimulate the palate, and the forms of beauty which can please the eye. There may be nothing in his whole life to offend the most chastened and fastidious delicacy; and yet, if the history of all this be powers which were meant for eternity frittered upon time, the man is degraded; if the spirit which was created to find its enjoyment in the love of God has settled down satisfied with the love of the world, then, just as surely as the sensualist of this parable, that man has turned aside from a celestial feast to prey on garbage.

We pass on to the second period of the history of God's treatment of a sinner. It is the period of his coming to himself, or what we call repentance. The first fact of religious experience which this parable suggests to us is that common truth, men desert the world when the world deserts them. The renegade came to himself when there were no more husks to eat. He would have remained away if he could

have got them, but it is written, "no man gave unto him." And this, brethren, is the record of our shame. Invitation is not enough; we must be driven to God. And the famine comes not by chance. God sends the famine into the soul, — the hunger, and thirst, and the disappointment, — to bring back his erring child again.

Now the world fastens upon that truth, and gets out of it a triumphant sarcasm against religion. They tell us that just as the caterpillar passes into the chrysalis, and the chrysalis into the butterfly, so profligacy passes into disgust, and disgust passes into religion. To use their own phraseology, when people become disappointed with the world it is the last resource, they say, to turn saint. So the men of the world speak, and they think they are profoundly philosophical and concise in the account they give. The world is welcome to its very small sneer. It is the glory of our Master's Gospel that it *is* the refuge of the broken-hearted. It is the strange mercy of our God that he does not reject the writhings of a jaded heart. Let the world curl its lip if it will, when it sees

through the causes of the prodigal's return. And if the sinner does not come to God, taught by this disappointment, what then? If affections crushed in early life have driven one man to God; if wrecked and ruined hopes have made another man religious; if want of success in a profession has broken the spirit; if the human life, lived out too passionately, has left a surfeit and a craving behind which end in seriousness; if one is brought by the sadness of widowed life, and another by the forced desolation of involuntary single life; if when the mighty famine comes into the heart, and not a husk is left, not a pleasure untried, then, and not till then, the remorseful resolve is made, "I will arise and go to my Father,"—well, brethren, what then? Why, this: that the history of penitence, produced as it so often is by mere disappointment, sheds only a brighter lustre round the love of Christ, who rejoices to receive such wanderers, worthless as they are, back into his bosom. Thank God, the world's sneer is true. It *is* the last resource to turn saint. Thanks to our God that when this gaudy

world has ceased to charm, when the heart begins to feel its hollowness, and the world has lost its satisfying power, still all is not yet lost, if penitence and Christ remain to still, to humble, and to soothe a heart which sin has fevered.

There is another truth contained in this section of the parable. After a life of wild sinfulness, religion is servitude at first, not freedom. Observe, he went back to duty with the feelings of a slave: "I am no more worthy to be called thy son; make me as one of thy hired servants." Any one who has lived in the excitement of the world, and then tried to settle down at once to quiet duty, knows how true that is. To borrow a metaphor from Israel's desert life, it is a tasteless thing to live on manna after you have been feasting upon quails. It is a dull cold drudgery to find pleasure in simple occupation when life has been a succession of strong emotions. Sonship it is not; it is slavery. A son obeys in love, entering heartily into his father's meaning. A servant obeys mechanically, rising early because he must; doing, it may be, his duty well, but feeling in all its force the irk-

someness of the service. Sonship does not come all at once. The yoke of Christ is easy, the burden of Christ is light; but it is not light to everybody. It is light when you love it, and no man who has sinned much can love it all at once.

Therefore, if I speak to anyone who is trying to be religious, and heavy in heart because his duty is done too formally, my Christian brother, fear not. You are returning, like the prodigal, with the feelings of a servant. Still it is a real return. The spirit of adoption will come afterwards. You will often have to do duties which you cannot relish, and in which you see no meaning. So it was with Naaman at the prophet's command. He bathed, not knowing why he was bidden to bathe, in Jordan. When you bend to prayer, often and often you will have to kneel with wandering thoughts and constraining lips to repeat words into which your heart scarcely enters. You will have to perform duties when the heart is cold, and without a spark of enthusiasm to warm you. But, my Christian brother, onward still.

Struggle to the cross, even though it be struggling as in chains. Just as on a day of clouds, when you have watched the distant hills, dark and gray with mist, suddenly a gleam of sunshine passing over reveals to you, in that flat surface, valleys and dells and spots of sunny happiness, which slept before unsuspected in the fog, so in the gloom of penitential life there will be times when God's deep peace and love will be felt shining into the soul with supernatural refreshment. Let the penitent be content with the servant's lot at first. Liberty and peace, and the bounding sensations of a Father's arms around you, come afterwards.

The last circumstance in this division of our subject is the reception which a sinner meets with on his return to God. "Bring forth the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet, and bring hither the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and be merry." This banquet represents to us two things. It tells of the father's gladness on his son's return. That represents God's joy on the reformation of a sinner. It tells of a banquet

and a dance given to the long-lost son. That represents the sinner's gladness when he first understood that God was reconciled to him in Christ. There is a strange, almost wild rapture, a strong gush of love and happiness in those days which are called the days of the first conversion. When a man who has sinned much — a profligate — turns to God, and it becomes first clear to his apprehension that there is love instead of spurning for him, there is a luxury of emotion — a banquet of tumultuous blessedness in the moment of first love to God, which stands alone in life, nothing before and nothing after like it. And, brethren, let us observe: this forgiveness is a thing granted while a man is yet afar off. We are not to wait for the right of being happy till we are good; we might wait forever. Joy is not delayed till we deserve it. Just so soon as a sinful man trusts that the mercy of God in Christ has done away with his transgression, the ring and the robe and the shoes are his, the banquet and the light of a Father's countenance.

Lastly, we have to consider very briefly God's

expostulation with a saint. There is another brother mentioned in this parable, who expressed something like indignation at the treatment which his brother met with. There are commentators who have imagined that this personage represents the Pharisees who complained that Jesus was receiving sinners. But this is manifestly impossible, because his father expostulates with him in this language, "Son, thou art ever with me"; not for one moment could that be true of the Pharisees. The true interpretation seems to be that this elder brother represents a real Christian perplexed with God's mysterious dealings. We have before us the description of one of those happy persons who have been filled with the Holy Ghost from their mother's womb, and on the whole (with imperfections, of course) remained God's servant all his life. For this is his own account of himself, which the father does not contradict. "Lo! these many years do I serve thee."

We observe, then, the objection made to the reception of a notorious sinner, "Thou never gavest me a kid." Now, in this we have a fact

true to Christian experience. Joy seems to be felt more vividly and more exuberantly by men who have sinned much, than by men who have grown up consistently from childhood with religious education. Rapture belongs to him whose sins, which are forgiven, are many. In the perplexity which this fact occasions, there is a feeling which is partly right and partly wrong. There is a surprise which is natural. There is a resentful jealousy which is to be rebuked.

There is first of all a natural surprise. It was natural that the elder brother should feel perplexed and hurt. When a sinner seems to be rewarded with more happiness than a saint, it appears as if good and evil were alike undistinguished in God's dealings. It seems like putting a reconciled enemy over the head of a tried servant. It looks as if it were a kind of encouragement held out to sin, and a man begins to feel, Well, if this is to be the caprice of my father's dealing; if this rich feast of gladness be the reward of a licentious life, "Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed

my hands in innocency." This is natural surprise.

But besides this there is a jealousy in these sensations of ours which God sees fit to rebuke. You have been trying to serve God all your life, and find it struggle, and heaviness, and dulness still. You see another who has outraged every obligation of life, and he is not tried by the deep prostration you think he ought to have, but bright with happiness at once. You have been making sacrifices all your life, and your worst trials come out of your most generous sacrifices. Your errors in judgment have been followed by sufferings sharper than those which crime itself could have brought. And you see men who never made a sacrifice unexposed to trial,—men whose life has been rapture purchased by the ruin of others' innocence, tasting first the pleasures of sin, and then the banquet of religion. You have been a moral man from childhood, and yet with all your efforts you feel the crushing conviction that it has never once been granted you to win a soul to God. And you see another

man marked by inconsistency and impetuosity, banqueting every day upon the blest success of impressing and saving souls. All that is startling. And then comes sadness and despondency; then come all those feelings which are so graphically depicted here: irritation—"he was angry"; swelling pride—"he would not go in"; jealousy, which required soothing—"his father went out and entreated him."

And now, brethren, mark the father's answer. It does not account for this strange dealing by God's sovereignty. It does not cut the knot of the difficulty, instead of untying it, by saying, God has a *right* to do what he will. He does not urge, God has a right to act on favoritism, if he please. But it assigns two reasons. The first reason is, "It was *meet*, right that we should make merry." It is meet that God should be glad on the reclamation of a sinner. It is meet that that sinner, looking down into the dreadful chasm over which he had been tottering, should feel a shudder of delight through all his frame on thinking of his escape. And it is meet that religious men should not feel jealous of one

another, but freely and generously join in thanking God that others have got happiness, even if *they* have not. The spirit of religious exclusiveness, which looks down contemptuously instead of tenderly on worldly men, and banishes a man forever from the circle of its joys because he has sinned notoriously, is a bad spirit.

Lastly, the reason given for this dealing is, "Son, thou art always with me, and all that I have is thine." By which Christ seems to tell us that the disproportion between man and man is much less than we suppose. The profligate had had one hour of ecstasy—the other had had a whole life of peace. A consistent Christian may not have rapture; but he has that which is much better than rapture: calmness, God's serene and perpetual presence. And after all, brethren, that is the best. One to whom much is forgiven has much joy. He must have it, if it were only to support him through those fearful trials which are to come, those haunting reminiscences of a polluted heart, those frailties, those inconsistencies to which the habits of past indulgence have made

him liable. A terrible struggle is in store for him yet. Grudge him not one hour of unclouded exultation. But religion's best gift, rest, serenity, the quiet daily love of one who lives perpetually with his Father's family, uninterrupted usefulness, — *that* belongs to him who has lived steadily, and walked with duty, neither grieving nor insulting the Holy Spirit of his God. The man who serves God early has the best of it; joy is well in its way, but a few flashes of joy are trifles in comparison with a life of peace. Which is best: the flash of joy lighting up the whole heart, and then darkness till the next flash comes, or the steady calm sunlight of day in which men work?

And now, one word to those who are living this young man's life, — thinking to become religious, as he did, when they have got tired of the world. I speak to those who are leading what, in the world's softened language of concealment, is called a gay life. Young brethren, let two motives be urged earnestly upon your attention. The first is the motive of mere honorable feeling. We will say nothing about the

uncertainty of life. We will not dwell upon this fact, — that impressions resisted now may never come back again. We will not appeal to terror. That is not the weapon which a Christian minister loves to use. If our lips were clothed with thunder, it is not denunciation which makes men Christians; let the appeal be made to every high and generous feeling in a young man's bosom.

Deliberately and calmly you are going to do *this*; to spend the best and most vigorous portion of your days in idleness, in uselessness, in the gratification of self, in the contamination of others. And then weakness, the relics and the miserable dregs of life; you are going to give *that* sorry offering to God, because his mercy endureth forever! Shame! shame upon the heart which can let such a plan rest in it one moment. If it be there, crush it like a man. It is a degrading thing to enjoy husks till there is no man to give them. It is a base thing to resolve to give to God as little as possible, and not to serve him till you must.

Young brethren, I speak principally to you.

You have health for God now. You have strength of mind and body. You have powers which may fit you for real usefulness. You have appetites for enjoyment which can be consecrated to God. You acknowledge the law of honor. Well, then, by every feeling of manliness and generosity, remember this: now, and not later, is your time to learn what religion means.

There is another motive, and a very solemn one, to be urged upon those who are delaying. Every moment of delay adds bitterness to after-struggles. The moment of a feeling of hired servitude must come. If a man will not obey God with a warm heart, he may hereafter have to do it with a cold one. To be holy is the work of a long life. The experience of ten thousand lessons teaches only a little of it; and all this, the work of becoming like God, the man who delays is crowding into the space of a few years or a few months. When we have lived long a life of sin, do we think that repentance and forgiveness will obliterate all the traces of sin upon the character? Be sure that every

sin pays its price: "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."

Oh! there are recollections of past sin which come crowding up to the brain, with temptation in them. There are old habits which refuse to be mastered by a few enthusiastic sensations. There is so much of the old man clinging to the penitent who has waited long; he is so much, as a religious man, like what he was when he was a worldly man, that it is doubtful whether he ever reaches in this world the full stature of Christian manhood. Much warm earnestness, but strange inconsistencies, — that is the character of one who is an old man and a young Christian. Brethren, do we wish to risk all this? Do we want to learn holiness with terrible struggles, and sore affliction, and the plague of much remaining evil? Then *wait* before you turn to God.

THE SHADOW AND SUBSTANCE OF THE SABBATH.

“Let no man, therefore, judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of a holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath-days; which are a shadow of things to come: but the body is of Christ.”— *Col.* ii. 16, 17.

NO sophistry of criticism can explain away the obvious meaning of these words. The apostle speaks of certain institutions as Jewish, shadowy, typical; and among these we are surprised to find the sabbath-days. It has been contended that there is here no allusion to the seventh day of rest, but only to certain Jewish holydays, not of divine institution. But, in the first place, the “holydays” have been already named in the same verse; in the next we are convinced that no plain man, reading this verse for the first time, without a doctrine to support, would have put such an interpretation upon the word, and we may be sure that St. Paul would

never have risked so certain a misconstruction of his words by the use of an ambiguous phrase, This, then, is the first thing we lay down, — a very simple postulate, one would think, — when the apostle *says* the sabbath-days, he *means* the sabbath-days.

Peculiar difficulties attend the discussion of the subject of the sabbath. If we take the strict and ultra ground of sabbath observance, basing it on the rigorous requirements of the fourth commandment, we take ground which is not true; and all untruth, whether it be an overstatement or a half-truth, recoils upon itself. If we impose on men a burden which cannot be borne, and demand a strictness which, possible in theory, is impossible in practice, men recoil; we have asked too much, and they give us nothing; the result is an open, wanton, and sarcastic desecration of the Day of Rest.

If, on the other hand, we state the truth, that the sabbath is obsolete — a shadow which has passed — without modification or explanations, evidently there is a danger no less perilous. It is true to spiritual, false to unspiritual, men,

and a wide door is opened for abuse. And recklessly to loosen the hold of a nation on the sanctity of the Lord's day would be most mischievous; to do so wilfully would be an act almost diabolical. For if we must choose between Puritan over-precision on the one hand, and on the other that laxity which, in many parts of the continent, has marked the day from other days only by more riotous worldliness, and a more entire abandonment of the whole community to amusement, no Christian would hesitate, no English Christian, at least, to whom that day is hallowed by all that is endearing in early associations, and who feels how much it is the very bulwark of his country's moral purity.

Here, however, as in other cases, it is the half-truth which is dangerous; the other half is the corrective; the whole truth alone is safe. If we say the sabbath is shadow, this is only half the truth. The apostle adds, "the body is of Christ."

There is, then, in the sabbath, that which is shadowy and that which is substantial; that

which is transient and that which is permanent; that which is temporal and typical, and that which is eternal,—the shadow and the body. Hence, a very natural and simple division of our subject suggests itself.

I. *The transient shadow of the sabbath which has passed away.*

II. *The permanent substance which cannot pass.*

I. The transient shadow which has passed away.

The history of the sabbath-day is this. It was given by Moses to the Israelites, partly as a sign between God and them, marking them off from all other nations by its observance; partly as commemorative of their deliverance from Egypt. And the reason why the seventh day was fixed on, rather than the sixth or eighth was, that on that day God rested from his labor. The soul of man was to form itself on the model of the Spirit of God. It is not said that God at the creation gave the sabbath to man, but that God rested at the close of the six days of creation, whereupon he had blessed

and sanctified the seventh day to the Israelites. This is stated in the fourth commandment, and also in Gen. i., which was written for the Israelites; and the history of creation naturally and appropriately introduces the reason and the sanction of their day of rest.

Nor is there in the Old Testament a single trace of the observance of the sabbath before the time of Moses. After the Deluge, it is not mentioned in the covenant made with Noah. The first account of it occurs after the Israelites had left Egypt; and the fourth commandment consolidates it into a law, and explains the principle and sanctions of the institution. The observance of one day in seven, therefore, is purely Jewish. The Jewish obligation to observe it rested on the enactment given by Moses.

The spirit of its observance, too, is Jewish, and not Christian. There is a difference between the spirit of Judaism and that of Christianity. The spirit of Judaism is separation; that of Christianity is permeation. To separate the evil from the good was the aim and work of Judaism, — to sever one nation from all other

nations; certain meats from other meat; certain days from other days. Sanctify means to set apart. The very essence of the idea of Hebrew holiness lay in sanctification in the sense of separation. On the contrary, Christianity is permeation, — it permeates all evil with good; it aims at overcoming evil by good; it desires to transfuse the spirit of the day of rest into all other days, and to spread the holiness of one nation over all the world. To saturate life with God, and the world with Heaven, that is the genius of Christianity.

Accordingly, the observance of the sabbath was entirely in the Jewish spirit. No fire was permitted to be made on pain of death: Ex. xxxv. 3. No food was to be prepared: Ex. xvi. 5, 23. No buying nor selling: Neh. x. 31. So rigorously was all this carried out, that a man gathering sticks was arraigned before the congregation, and sentenced to death by Moses.

This is Jewish, typical, shadowy; it is all to pass away. Much already has passed; even those who believe our Lord's day to be the descendant of the sabbath admit this. The

day is changed. The first day of the week has taken the place of the seventh. The computation of hours is altered. The Jews reckoned from sunset to sunset; modern Christians reckon from midnight to midnight. The spirit of its observance, too, is altered. No one contends now for Jewish strictness in its details.

Now, observe, all this implies the abrogation of a great deal more, — nay, of the whole Jewish sabbath itself. We have altered the day, the computation of the hours, the mode of observance. What remains to keep? Absolutely nothing of the literal portion except one day in seven, and that is abrogated, if the rest be abrogated. For by what right do we say that the order of the day, whether it be the first or the seventh, is a matter of indifference, because only formal, but that the proportion of days, one in seven instead of one in eight or nine, is moral and unalterable? On what intelligible principle do we produce the fourth commandment as binding upon Christians, and abrogate so important a clause of it as, “In it thou shalt do no manner of work”? On what self-evident

ground is it shown that the Jew might not light a fire, but the Christian may; yet that if the postal arrangements of a country permit the delivery of a letter, it is an infraction of the sabbath?

Unquestionably, on no scriptural authority. Let those who demand a strict observance of the letter of scripture remember that the Jewish sabbath is distinctly enforced in the Bible, and nowhere in the Bible repealed. You have changed the seventh day to the first on no clear scriptural permission. Two or three passages tell us that, after the Resurrection, the apostles were found together on the first day of the week (which, by the way, may have been Saturday evening, after sunset). But it is concluded that therefore *probably* the change was apostolic. You have only a probability to go on, and that probability, except with the aid of tradition, infinitesimally small, for the abrogation of a single iota of the Jewish fourth commandment.

It will be said, however, that works of necessity and works of mercy are excepted by Christ's example.

Tell us, then, ye who are servants of the letter, and yet do not scruple to use a carriage to convey you to some church where a favorite minister is heard, is that a spiritual necessity or a spiritual luxury? Part of the Sunday meal of all of you is the result of a servant's work. Tell us, then, ye accurate logicians, who say that nothing escapes the rigor of the prohibition which is not necessary or merciful, is a hot repast a work of necessity or a work of mercy? Oh, it rouses in every true soul a deep and earnest indignation to hear men who drive their cattle to church on Sundays, because they are too emasculated to trudge through cold and rain on foot, invoke the severity of an insulted Law of the Decalogue on those who provide facilities of movement for such as cannot afford the luxury of a carriage. What think you, would He who blighted the Pharisees with such burning words, have said, had He been present by, while men, whose servants clean their houses, and prepare their meals, and harness their horses, stand up to denounce the service on some railway by which the poor are helped to health and enjoy-

ment? Hired service for the rich is a necessity; hired service for the poor is a desecration of the sabbath! It is right that a thousand should toil for the few in private! It is past bearing in a Christian country that a few should toil for thousands on the sabbath-day!

There is only this alternative: if the fourth commandment be binding still, that clause is unrepealed, — “no manner of work”; and so, too, is that other important part, the sanctification of the seventh day and not the first. If the fourth commandment be not binding in these points, then there is nothing left but the broad, comprehensive ground taken by the apostle. The whole sabbath is a shadow of things to come. In consistency, either hold that none of the formal part is abrogated, or else all. The whole of the letter of the commandment is moral, or else none.

II. There is, however, in the sabbath a substance, a permanent something, — a “body,” — which cannot pass away. •

“The body is of Christ”; the spirit of Christ is the fulfilment of the law. To have the spirit

of Christ is to have fulfilled the law. Let us hear the mind of Christ in this matter. "The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath." In that principle, rightly understood, lies the clew for the unravelling of the whole matter. The religionists of that day maintained that the necessities of man's nature must give way to the rigor of the enactment; He taught that the enactment must yield to man's necessities. They said that the sabbath was written in the book of the law; He said that it was written on man's nature, and that the law was merely meant to be in accordance with that nature. They based the obligation to observe the sabbath on the sacredness of an enactment; He on the sacredness of the nature of man.

An illustration will help us to perceive the difference between these two views. A wise physician prescribes a regimen of diet to a palate which has become diseased; he fixes what shall be eaten, the quantity, the hours, and number of times. On what does the obligation to obey rest? On the arbitrary authority of the physician? or on the nature with which

that prescription is in accordance? When soundness and health are restored, the prescription falls into disuse; but the nature remains unalterable, which has made some things nutritious, others unwholesome, and excess forever pernicious. Thus the spirit of the prescription may be still in force when the prescriptive authority is repealed.

So Moses prescribed the sabbath to a nation spiritually diseased. He gave the regimen of rest to men who did not feel the need of spiritual rest. He fenced round his rule with precise regulations of details,—one day in seven, no work, no fire, no traffic. On what does the obligation to obey it rest? On the authority of the rule? or on the necessities of that nature for which the rule was divinely adapted? Was man made for the sabbath, to obey it as a slave? or, was the sabbath made for man? And when spiritual health has been restored, the law regulating the details of rest may become obsolete; but the nature which demands rest never can be reversed.

Observe, now, that this is a far grander, safer,

and more permanent basis on which to rest the sabbath than the mere enactment. For if you allege the fourth commandment as your authority, straightway you are met by the objection, "no *manner* of work." Who gave you leave to alter that? And if you reply, works of necessity and works of mercy I may do, for Christ excepted these from the stringency of the rule, again the rejoinder comes, Is there one in ten of the things that all Christians permit as lawful really a matter of necessity?

Whereas, if the sabbath rest on the needs of human nature, and we accept His decision that the sabbath was made for *man*, then you have an eternal ground to rest on from which you cannot be shaken. A son of man may be lord of the sabbath-day, but he is not lord of his own nature. He cannot make one hair white or black. You may abrogate the formal rule, but you cannot abrogate the needs of your own soul. Eternal as the constitution of the soul of man is the necessity for the existence of a day of rest. Further still, on this ground alone can you find an impregnable defence of the *pro-*

portion, one day in seven ; on the other ground it is unsafe. Having altered the seventh to the first, I know not why one in seven might not be altered to one in ten. The thing, however, has been tried ; and by the necessities of human nature the change has been found pernicious. One day in ten, prescribed by revolutionary France, was actually pronounced by physiologists insufficient. So that we begin to find that, in a deeper sense than we at first suspected, "the sabbath was made for man." Even in the contrivance of one day in seven, it was arranged by unerring wisdom. Just because the sabbath was made for man, and not because man was ordained to keep the sabbath-day, you cannot tamper even with the iota, one day in seven.

That necessity on which the observance leans is the need of rest. It is the deepest want in the soul of man. If you take off covering after covering of the nature which wraps him round, till you come to the central heart of hearts, deep lodged there you find the requirement of repose. All men do not hanker after pleasure ; all men do not crave intellectual food. But

all men long for rest; the most restless that ever pursued a turbulent career on earth did, by that career, only testify to the need of the soul within. They craved for something which was not given; there was a thirst which was not slaked; that very restlessness betokened that, —restless because not at rest. It is this need which sometimes makes the quiet of the grave an object of such deep desire. “There the wicked cease from troubling, and there the weary are at rest.” It is this which creates the chief desirableness of heaven: “There remaineth a rest for the people of God.” And it is this which, consciously or unconsciously, is the real wish that lies at the bottom of all others. Oh! for tranquillity of heart; heaven’s profound silence in the soul, “a meek and quiet spirit, which in the sight of God is of great price!”

The rest needed by man is twofold. Physical repose of the body — a need which he shares with the animals through the lower nature which he has in common with them. “Thou shalt do no work, nor thy cattle,” —so far man’s sabbath-need places him only on a level with the ox and with the ass.

But, besides this, the rest demanded is a repose of spirit. Between these two kinds of rest there is a very important difference. Bodily repose is simply inaction; the rest of the soul is exercise, not torpor. To do nothing is physical rest; to be engaged in full activity is the rest of the soul.

In that hour, which of all the twenty-four is most emblematical of heaven, and suggestive of repose, the eventide, in which instinctively Isaac went into the fields to meditate, when the work of the day is done, when the mind has ceased its tension, when the passions are lulled to rest in spite of themselves, by the spell of the quiet star-lit sky, — it is, then, amidst the silence of the lull of all the lower parts of our nature, that the soul comes forth to do its work. Then the peculiar, strange work of the soul, which the intellect cannot do, meditation, begins. Awe and worship and wonder are in full exercise; and love begins then in its purest form of mystic adoration and pervasive and undefined tenderness, separate from all that is coarse and earthly, swelling as if it would

embrace the All in its desire to bless, and lose itself in the sea of the love of God. This is the rest of the soul, — the *exercise* and play of all the nobler powers.

Two things are suggested by this thought.

First, the mode of the observance of the day of rest. It has become lately a subject of very considerable attention. Physiologists have demonstrated the necessity of cessation from toil; they have urged the impossibility of perpetual occupation without end. Pictures, with much pathos in them, have been placed before us, describing the hard fate of those on whom no sabbath dawns. It has been demanded as a right, entreated as a mercy, on behalf of the laboring man, that he should have one day in seven for recreation of his bodily energies. All well and true. But there is a great deal more than this. He who confines his conception of the need of rest to that, has left man on a level with the brutes. Let a man take merely lax and liberal notions of the fourth commandment, let him give his household and dependents immunity from toil, and wish for himself and

them no more, — he will find that there is a something wanting still. Experience tells us, after a trial, that those Sundays are the happiest, the purest, the most rich in blessing, in which the spiritual part has been most attended to; those in which the business letter was put aside till evening, and the profane literature not opened, and the ordinary occupations entirely suspended; those in which, as in the temple of Solomon, the sound of the earthly hammer has not been heard in the temple of the soul; for this is, in fact, the very distinction between the spirit of the Jewish sabbath and the spirit of the Christian Lord's day. The one is chiefly for the body, "Thou shalt do no manner of work." The other is principally for the soul, "I was in the spirit on the Lord's day."

The other truth suggested by that fact, that the repose of the soul is exercise, not rest, is, that it conveys an intimation of man's immortality. It is only when all the rest of our human nature is calmed that the spirit comes forth in full energy; all the rest tires, the spirit never tires. Humbleness, awe, adoration, love, — these

have in them no weariness; so that when this frame shall be dissolved into the dust of the earth, and the mind, which is merely fitted for this time-world, learning by experience, shall have been superseded, then, in the opening out of an endless career of love, the spirit will enter upon that sabbath of which all earthly sabbaths are but the shadow, the sabbath of eternity, the immortal rest of its Father's home.

Two observations, in concluding.

1. When is a son of man lord of the sabbath-day? To whom may the sabbath safely become a shadow? I reply, he that has the mind of Christ may exercise discretionary lordship over the sabbath-day. He who is in possession of the substance may let the shadow go. A man in health has done with the prescriptions of the physician. But for an unspiritual man to regulate his hours and amount of rest by his desires, is just as preposterous as for an unhealthy man to rule his appetites by his sensations. Win the mind of Christ; be like him; and then, in the reality of rest in God, the sabbath form of rest will be superseded. Remain apart from Christ,

and then you are under the law again; the fourth commandment is as necessary for you as it was for the Israelite,—the prescriptive regimen which may discipline your soul to a sounder state. It is at his peril that the worldly man departs from the *rule* of the day of rest. Nothing can make us free from the law but the Spirit.

2. The rule pronounced by the apostle is a rule of liberty, and at the same time a rule of charity: "Let no man judge you in respect of the sabbath-days." It is very difficult to discuss this question of the sabbath. Heat, vehemence, acrimony, are substituted for argument. When you calmly ask to investigate the subject, men apply epithets, and call them reasons; they stigmatize you as a breaker of the sabbath, pronounce you "dangerous," with sundry warnings against you in private, and pregnant hints in public.

The apostle urges charity: "One man esteemeth one day above another; another man esteemeth every day alike. . . . He that regardeth the day, regardeth it to the Lord;

and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he regardeth it not." Carry out that spirit. In the detail of this question there is abundant difficulty. It is a question of degree. Some work must be done on the sabbath-day; some must sacrifice their rest to the rest of others; for all human life is sacrifice, voluntary or involuntary.

Again, that which is rest to one man is not rest to another. To require the illiterate man to read his Bible for some hours would impose a toil upon him, though it might be a relaxation to you. To the laboring man a larger proportion of the day must be given to the recreation of his physical nature than is necessary for the man of leisure, to whom the spiritual observance of the day is easy, and seems all. Let us learn large, charitable considerateness. Let not the poor man sneer at his richer neighbor, if, in the exercise of his Christian liberty, he uses his horses to convey him to church and not to the mere drive of pleasure; but then, in fairness, let not the rich man be shocked and scandalized if the over-wearied shopkeeper and artisan

breathe the fresh air of heaven with their families in the country. "The sabbath was made for man." Be generous, consistent, large-minded. A man may hold stiff, precise Jewish notions on this subject, but do not stigmatize that man as a formalist. Another may hold large, Paul-like views of the abrogation of the fourth commandment, and yet he may be sincerely and zealously anxious for the hallowing of the day in his household and through his country. Do not call that man a sabbath-breaker. Remember, the Pharisees called the Son of God a sabbath-breaker. They kept the law of the sabbath, they broke the law of love. Which was the worst to break? Which was the higher law to keep? Take care, lest, in the zeal which seems to you to be for Christ, ye be found indulging their spirit, and not his.

PURITY

“Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled.” — *Titus* i. 15.

FOR the evils of this world there are two classes of remedies, — one is the world's, the other is God's. The world proposes to remedy evil by adjusting the circumstances of this life to man's desires. The world says, Give us a perfect set of *circumstances*, and then we shall have a set of perfect men. This principle lies at the root of the system called Socialism. Socialism proceeds on the principle that all moral and even physical evil arises from unjust laws. If the cause be remedied, the effect will be good. But Christianity throws aside all that as merely chimerical. It proves that the fault is not in outward circumstances, but in ourselves. Like the wise physician who, instead of

busying himself with transcendental theories to improve the climate and the outward circumstances of man, endeavors to relieve and get rid of the tendencies of disease which are from within, Christianity, leaving all outward circumstances to ameliorate themselves, fastens its attention on the spirit which has to deal with them. Christ has declared that the kingdom of heaven is from within. He said to the Pharisee, "Ye make clean the outside of the cup and platter, but within ye are full of extortion and excess." The remedy for all this is a large and liberal charity, so overflowing that "unto the pure all things are pure." To internal purity all external things *become* pure. The principle that St. Paul has here laid down is, that each man is the creator of his own world; he walks in a universe of his own creation.

As the free air is to one out of health the cause of cold and diseased lungs, so to the healthy man it is a source of greater vigor. The rotten fruit is sweet to the worm, but nauseous to the palate of man. It is the same air and the same fruit acting differently upon

different beings. To different men a different world; to one all pollution, to another all purity. To the noble all things are noble; to the mean all things are contemptible.

The subject divides itself into two parts.

I. *The apostles' principle.*

II. *The application of the principle.*

Here we have the same principle again; each man creates his own world. Take it in its simplest form. The eye creates the outward world it sees. We see not things as they are, but as God has made the eye to receive them.

In its strictest sense, the creation of a new man is the creation of a new universe. Conceive an eye so constructed as that the planets and all within them should be minutely seen, and all that is near should be dim and invisible like things seen through a telescope, or as we see through a magnifying glass the plumage of the butterfly and the bloom upon the peach; then it is manifestly clear that we have called into existence actually a new *creation*, and not new objects. The mind's eye creates a world for itself.

Again, the visible world presents a different aspect to each individual man. You will say that the same things you see are seen by all; that the forest, the valley, the flood, and the sea are the same to all; and yet all these things so seen, to different minds, are a myriad of different universes. One man sees in that noble river an emblem of eternity: he closes his lips and feels that God is there. Another sees nothing in it but a very convenient road for transporting his spices, silks, and merchandise. To one this world appears useful, to another beautiful. Whence comes the difference? From the soul within us. It can make of this world a vast chaos, "a mighty maze without a plan," or a mere machine, a collection of lifeless forces; or it can make it the living vesture of God, the tissue through which he can become visible to us. In the spirit in which we look on it, the world is an arena for mere self-advancement, or a place for noble deeds, in which self is forgotten and God is all.

Observe, this effect is traceable even in that produced by our different and changeful moods.

We make and unmake a world more than once in the space of a single day. In trifling moods all seems trivial. In serious moods all seems solemn. Is the song of the nightingale merry or plaintive? Is it the voice of joy or the harbinger of gloom? Sometimes one and sometimes the other, according to our different moods. We hear the ocean furious or exulting. The thunder-claps are grand, or angry, according to the different states of our mind. Nay, the very church-bells chime sadly or merrily, as our associations determine. They speak the language of our passing moods. The young adventurer, revolving sanguine plans upon the milestones, hears them speak to him as God did to Hagar in the wilderness, bidding him back to perseverance and greatness. The soul spreads its own hue over everything; the shroud or wedding-garment of nature is woven in the loom of our own feelings. This universe is the express image and direct counterpart of the souls that dwell in it. Be noble-minded, and all nature replies, I am divine, the child of God; be thou, too, his child, and noble. Be mean,

and all nature dwindles into a contemptible smallness.

In the second place, there are two ways in which this principle is true. To the pure, all things and all persons are pure, because their purity makes all seem pure.

There are some who go through life complaining of this world; they say they have found nothing but treachery and deceit; the poor are ungrateful, and the rich are selfish. Yet we do not find such the best men. Experience tells us that each man most keenly and unerringly detects in others the vice with which he is most familiar himself.

Persons seem to each man what he is himself. One who suspects hypocrisy in the world is rarely transparent; the man constantly on the watch for cheating is generally dishonest; he who suspects impurity is prurient. This is the principle to which Christ alludes when he says, "Give alms of such things as ye have; and behold all things are clean unto you."

Have a large charity! Large "charity hopeth all things." Look at that sublime apostle who

saw the churches of Ephesus and Thessalonica pure, because he saw them in his own large love, and painted them, not as they were, but as his heart filled up the picture; he viewed them in the light of his own nobleness, as representations of his own purity.

Once more: to the pure all *things* are pure, as well as all persons. That which is natural lies not in things, but in the minds of men. There is a difference between prudery and modesty. Prudery detects wrong where no wrong is; the wrong lies in the thoughts, and not in the objects. There is something of oversensitiveness and over-delicacy which shows not innocence, but an inflammable imagination. And men of the world cannot understand that those subjects and thoughts which to them are full of torture, can be harmless, suggesting nothing evil to the pure in heart.

Here, however, beware! No sentence of scripture is more frequently in the lips of persons who permit themselves much license, than the text, "To the pure all things are pure." Yes, all things natural, but not artificial — scenes

which pamper the tastes, which excite the senses. Innocence feels healthily. To it all nature is pure. But, just as the dove trembles at the approach of the hawk, and the young calf shudders at the lion never seen before, so innocence shrinks instinctively from what is wrong by the same divine instinct. If that which is wrong seems pure, then the heart is not pure but vitiated. To the right-minded all that is right in the course of this world seems pure. Abraham, looking forward to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, entreated that it might be averted, and afterwards acquiesced! To the disordered mind, "all things are out of course." This is the spirit which pervades the whole of the Ecclesiastes. There were two things which were perpetually suggesting themselves to the mind of Solomon: the intolerable sameness of this world, and the constant desire for change. And yet that same world, spread before the serene eye of God, was pronounced to be all "very good."

This disordered universe is the picture of your own mind. We make a wilderness by

encouraging artificial wants, by creating sensitive and selfish feelings; then we project everything stamped with the impress of our own feelings, and we gather the whole of creation into our own pained being, "the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now." The world you complain of as impure and wrong is not God's world, but your world; the blight, the dulness, the blank, are all your own. The light which is in you has become darkness, and, therefore, the light itself is dark.

Again, to the pure all things not only seem pure, but are really so because they are made such.

First, as regards persons. It is a marvellous thing to see how a pure and innocent heart purifies all that it approaches. The most ferocious natures are soothed and tamed by innocence. And so with human beings, there is a delicacy so pure that vicious men in its presence become almost pure; all of purity which is in them is brought out; like attaches itself to like. The pure heart becomes a centre of attraction round which similar atoms gather,

and from which dissimilar ones are repelled. A corrupt heart elicits in an hour all that is bad in us; a spiritual one brings out and draws to itself all that is best and purest. Such was Christ. He stood in the world the light of the world, to which all sparks of light gradually gathered. He stood in the presence of impurity, and men became pure. Note this in the history of Zaccheus. In answer to the invitation of the Son of Man, he says, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor, and if I have done wrong to any man I restore him fourfold." So also the scribe, "Well, Master, thou hast well said, there is one God, and there is none other than he." To the pure Saviour all was pure, "He was lifted up on high, and drew all men unto him."

Lastly, all situations are pure to the pure. According to the world, some professions are reckoned honorable and some dishonorable. Men judge according to a standard merely conventional, and not by that of moral rectitude. Yet it was in truth the men who were in these situations which made them such. In

the days of the Redeemer the publican's occupation was a degraded one, merely because low, base men filled that place. But since He was born into the world a poor, laboring man, poverty is noble and dignified, and toil is honorable. To the man who feels that "the king's daughter is all glorious within," no outward situation can seem inglorious or impure.

There are three words which express almost the same thing, but whose meaning is entirely different. These are, the gibbet, the scaffold, and the cross. So far as we know, none die on the gibbet but men of dishonorable and base life. The scaffold suggests to our minds the noble deaths of our greatest martyrs. The cross was once a gibbet, but it is now the highest name we have, because He hung on it. Christ has purified and ennobled the cross. This principle runs through life. It is not the situation which makes the man, but the man who makes the situation. The slave may be a freeman. The monarch may be a slave. Situations are noble or ignoble, as we make them.

From all this subject we learn to understand

two things. Hence we understand the fall. When man fell, the world fell with him. All creation received a shock. Thorns, briars, and thistles sprang up. They were there before, but to the now restless and impatient hands of men they became obstacles and weeds. Death, which must ever have existed as a form of dissolution, a passing from one state to another, became a curse; the sting of death was sin, unchanged in itself, it changed in man. A dark heavy cloud rested on it, the shadow of his own guilty heart.

Hence, too, we understand the millennium. The Bible says that these things are not to be forever. There are glorious things to come. Just as in my former illustration, the alteration of the eye called new worlds into being, so now nothing more is needed than to re-create the soul, the mirror on which all things are reflected. Then is realized the prophecy of Isaiah: "Behold, I create all things new," "new heavens and a new earth."

The conclusion of this verse proves to us why all these new creations were called into

being, "wherein dwelleth righteousness." To be righteous makes all things new. We do not want a new world, we want *new hearts*. Let the spirit of God purify Society, and to the pure all things will be pure. The earth will put off the look of weariness and gloom which it has worn so long, and then the glorious language of the prophets will be fulfilled, "The forests will break out with singing, and the desert will blossom as the rose."

CHRIST'S WAY OF DEALING WITH SIN.

"And immediately, when Jesus perceived in his spirit that they so reasoned within themselves, he said unto them, Why reason ye these things in your hearts? Whether is it easier to say to the sick of the palsy, Thy sins be forgiven thee; or to say, Arise, and take up thy bed, and walk? But that ye may know that the Son of man hath power on earth to forgive sins (he saith to the sick of the palsy), I say unto thee, Arise, and take up thy bed, and go thy way into thine house." — *Mark* ii. 8-11.

THIS anecdote is doubtless a familiar one to us all.

The Son of God was teaching in a house full of listeners, round which crowds were pressing. The friends of a poor palsied man desired his aid. It was scarcely possible for one person to edge his way through the press, where all longed to hear, and none of the crowd were likely to give place; but, for the cumbrous apparatus of a pallet borne by four, it was impossible. Therefore, they ascended by the outside stair-

case, which, in Oriental countries, leads to the flat roof, which they broke up and let their friend down in the midst, before Jesus. No doubt, this must have struck every one. But the impression produced on the spectators would probably have been very different from that produced on Christ. They that saw the bed descending from the roof over the heads of all, and who had before seen the fruitless efforts that had been made to get in, and now remembered that he who had been farthest from Christ was unexpectedly in a few minutes nearest to him, could not have withheld that applause which follows a successful piece of dexterity. They would have admired the perseverance, or the ingenuity, or the inventiveness.

On none of these qualities did Christ fix as an explanation of the fact. He went deeper. He traced it to the deepest source of power that exists in the mind of man. "When Jesus saw their *faith*." For as love is deepest in the being of God, so faith is the mightiest principle in the soul of man. Let us distinguish their several essences. Love is the essence of the

Deity, that which makes it Deity. Faith is the essence of humanity, which constitutes it what it is. And, as here, it is the warring principle of this world which wins in life's battle. No wonder that it is written in scripture, "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." No wonder it is said, "All things are possible to him that believeth." It is that which wrestles with difficulty, removes mountains, tramples upon impossibilities. It is this spirit which, in the common affairs of life, known as a "sanguine temperament," never says "impossible" and never believes in failure, leads the men of the world to their most signal successes, making them believe a thing possible because they hope it; and giving substantial reality to that which before was a shadow and a dream.

It was this "substance of things hoped for" that gave America to Columbus, when billows, miles deep, rose between him and the land, and the men he commanded well-nigh rose in rebellion against the obstinacy which believed in "things not yet seen." It was this that crowned

the Mohammedan arms for seven centuries with victory; so long as they believed themselves the champions of the one God with a mission from him, they were invincible. And it is this which so often obtains for some new system of medicine the honor of a cure, when the real cause of cure is only the patient's trust in the remedies.

So it is in religion. For faith is not something heard of in theology alone, created by Christianity, but it is one of the commonest principles of life. He that believes a blessing is to be got, that "God is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him," will venture much, and will likewise win much. For, as with this palsied man, faith is inventive, ever fertile in expedients, like our own English character, never knowing when it has been foiled; and then nearest victory at the very moment when the last chance has seemed to fail. We divide our subject into, —

I. *The malady presented to Christ.*

II. *His treatment of it.*

I. The malady, apparently, was nothing more

than palsy. But not as such did Jesus treat it. The by-standers might have been surprised at the first accost of Jesus to the paralytic man. It was not, "Take up thy bed and walk"; but "Thy sins be forgiven thee." As with their faith, so it was here. He went deeper than perseverance or ingenuity. He goes deeper than the outward evil; down to the evil, the root of all evil, properly the only evil, sin. He read in that sufferer's heart a deeper wish than appeared in the outward act, the consequences of a burden worse than palsy, the longing for a rest more profound than release from pain, — the desire to be healed of guilt. It was in reply to this tacit application that the words, "Thy sins be forgiven thee," were spoken.

Now, sin has a twofold set of consequences:
1. The natural consequences. 2. The moral consequences.

1. By the natural, we mean those results which come inevitably in the train of wrongdoing, by what we call the laws of nature visiting themselves on the outward condition of a sinner, by which sin and suffering are linked

together. As, for example, when an intemperate man ruins his health, or an extravagant man leaves himself broken in fortune; or when tyrannical laws bring an uprising of a people against a tyrant; these are respectively the natural penalties of wrong-doing.

Here, apparently, palsy had been the natural result of sin; for otherwise the address of Christ was out of place and meaningless. And what we are concerned to remark is, that these natural consequences of sin are often invisible as well as inevitable. Probably not one of the four friends who bore him suspected such a connection. Possibly not even his physician. But there were two at least to whom the connection was certain,—the conscience of the palsied man himself, whose awakened memory traced back the trembling of those limbs to the acts of a youth long past; and to the all-seeing eye of him to whom past, present, and future are but one.

And such experience, brethren, is true, doubtless, much oftener than we imagine. The irritable temperament, the lost memory which men

bewail, the over-sensitive brain, as if causeless, who can tell how they stand connected with sins done long ago? For nothing here stands alone and causeless. Every man, with his strength and his weaknesses, stunted in body or dwarfed in heart, palsied in nerve or deadened in sensibility, is the exact result and aggregate of all the past; all that has been done by himself, and all that has been done by his ancestors, remote or near. The Saviour saw in this palsied man the miserable wreck of an ill-spent life.

2. Now quite distinct from these are the moral consequences of guilt; by which I mean those which tell upon the character and inward being of the man who sins. In one sense, no doubt, it is a *natural* result, inasmuch as it is by a law, regular and unalterable, a man becomes, by sin, deteriorated in character, or miserable. Now these are twofold, negative and positive; the loss of some blessing, or the accruing of some evil to the heart. Loss, as when, by sinning, we lose the capacity for all higher enjoyments; for none can sin without

blunting his sensibilities. He has lost the zest of a pure life, the freshness and the flood of happiness which come to every soul when it is delicate, and pure, and natural. This is no light loss. If anyone here congratulates himself that sin has brought to him no positive misery, my brother, I pray you to remember that God's worst curse was pronounced upon the serpent tempter. Apparently, it was far less than that pronounced on the woman, but really it was far more terrible. Not pain, not shame, no, these are remedial, and may bring penitence at last; but to sink the angel in the animal, the spirit in the flesh; to be a reptile, and to eat the dust of degradation as if it were natural food, — eternity has no damnation deeper than that.

Then, again, a positive result, the dark and dreadful loneliness that comes from doing wrong; a conscious unrest which plunges into business, or pleasure, or society, not for the love of these things, but to hide itself from itself, as Adam did in the trees of the garden, because it dare not hear the voice of God, nor believe in his

presence. Do we not know something of a self-reproach and self-contempt, which, alternating at times with pride, almost tear the soul asunder? And such was the state of this man. His pains were but the counterpart and reflection of a deeper sorrow. Pain had laid him on a bed, and said to him, "Lie there, face to face with God, and think!" We pass on now to consider —

II. Christ's treatment of that malady.

By the declaration of God's forgiveness. Brethren, if the Gospel of our Master mean anything, it means this, the blotting out of sin: "To declare his righteousness in the remission of sins that are past." It is the declaration of the highest name of God, love. Let us understand what forgiveness is. The forgiveness of God acts upon the moral consequences of sin directly and immediately; on the natural, mediately and indirectly.

Upon the moral consequences directly. Remorse passes into penitence and love. There is no more loneliness, for God has taken up his abode there. No more self-contempt, for he

whom God has forgiven learns to forgive himself. There is no more unrest, for "being justified by faith, we have peace with God." Then the fountains of the great deep are broken up, and unwonted happy tears can come, as with the woman in the Gospels. I pray you to observe that this comes directly, with no interval, "Being justified by faith." For God's love is not an offer but a gift; not clogged with conditions, but free as the air we breathe.

Upon the natural consequences, not directly, but indirectly and mediately. The forgiveness of Christ did not remove the palsy; that was the result of a separate, distinct act of Christ. It is quite conceivable that it might never have been removed at all, that he might have been forgiven, and the palsy suffered to remain. God might have dealt with him as he did in David's case; on his repentance there came to him the declaration of God's pardon, his person was accepted, the moral consequences were removed, but the natural consequences remained. "The Lord hath put away thy sin, nevertheless, the child which is born to thee shall die."

Consider, too, that without a miracle they *must* have remained in this man's case. It is so in everyday life. If the intemperate man repents he will receive forgiveness, but will that penitence give him back the steady hand of youth? Or, if the suicide between the moment of draining the poisoned cup and that of death repent of his deed, will that arrest the operation of the poison? A strong constitution or the physician may possibly save life; but penitence has nothing to do with it. Say that the natural penal consequence of crime is the scaffold: did the pardon given to the dying thief unnail his hands? Did Christ's forgiveness interfere with the natural consequences of his guilt?

And thus, we are brought to a very solemn and awful consideration, awful because of its truth and simplicity. The consequences of past deeds remain. They have become part of the chain of the universe, effects which now are causes, and will work and interweave themselves with the history of the world forever. You cannot undo your acts. If you have depraved another's will, and injured another's soul, it may

be in the grace of God that hereafter you will be personally accepted and the consequences of your guilt inwardly done away, but your penitence cannot undo the evil you have done; and God's worst punishment may be that you may have to gaze, half frantic, on the ruin you have caused, on the evil you have done, which you might have left undone, but which being done is now beyond your power forever. This is the eternity of human acts. The forgiveness of God, the blood of Christ itself, does not undo the past.

And yet, even here the grace of God's forgiveness is not in vain. It cannot undo the natural consequences of sin, but it may, by his mercy, transform them into blessings. For example, suppose this man's palsy to have been left still with him, himself accepted, his soul at peace. Well, he is thenceforth a crippled man. But crippling, pain, are these necessarily evils? Do we not say continually that sorrow and pain are God's loving discipline given to his legitimate children, to be exempt from which were no blessing, proving them to be "bastards and

not sons"? And why should not that palsy be such to him, though it was the result of his own fault? Once, when it seemed in the light of the guilty conscience only the foretaste of coming doom, the outward a type of the inward, every pang sending him farther from God, it was a curse. Now, when penitence and love had come, and that palsy was received with patience, meekness, why may it not be a blessing? What makes the outward events of life blessings or the reverse? Is it not all from ourselves? Did not dissolution become quite another thing by the fall, changed into *death*; assuming thereby an entirely altered character; no longer felt as a natural, blessed herald, becoming the messenger of God, summoning to higher life, but now obtaining that strange name, the "king of terrors"? And in Christ, death becomes our minister again, "Ours," as St. Paul says, "with all other things." The cross of Christ has restored to death something more blessed than its original peacefulness. A sleep now; not death at all. And will not a changed heart change all things around us, and

make the worst consequence of our own mis-doing minister to our eternal welfare? So that God's forgiveness, assured to us in the cross of Christ, is a complete remedy for sin, acting on its natural consequences by transformation indirectly; on its moral results directly, by removing them.

Lastly, let us learn from this the true aim and meaning of miracles. Let us attend to the account our Master gives us of the reason why he performed this miracle. Read verses 9, 10. To say, "Thy sins be forgiven thee," was easy, for no visible result could test the saying. To say, "Take up thy bed and walk," was not apparently so easy, for failure would cover with confusion. He said the last, leaving the inference, If I can do the most difficult, then, of course, I can do the easier. Here we have the true character of a miracle; it is the outward manifestation of the power of God, in order that we may believe in the power of God in things that are invisible.

Now contrast this with the popular view. Miracles are commonly reckoned as proofs of

Christ's mission, accrediting his other truths, and making them, which would be otherwise incredible, evidently from God. I hesitate not to say that nowhere in the New Testament are they spoken of in this way. When the Pharisees asked for evidences and signs, his reply was, "There shall no sign be given you." So said St. Paul in his Epistle to the Corinthians, not signs, but "Christ crucified." He had no conception of our modern notion of miracles, things chiefly valuable because they can be collected into a portable volume of evidences to prove that God is love; that we should love one another; that he is the father of all men. These need no proofs; they are like the sun shining by his own light.

Christ's glorious miracles were not to prove these, but that through the seen the unseen might be known; to show, as it were by specimens, the living power which works in ordinary as well as extraordinary cases. For instance, here, to show that the One who is *seen* to say with power, "Take up thy bed and walk," arresting the natural consequences of sin, is

actually, though unseen, arresting its moral consequences. Or again, that He who bade the waves "Be still" in Galilee, is holding now, at this moment, the winds in the hollow of his hand. That he who healed the sick and raised the dead, holds now and ever in his hand the issues of life and death. For the marvellous is to show the source of the common. Miracles were no concession to that infidel spirit which taints our modern Christianity, and which cannot believe in God's presence, except it can see him in the supernatural. Rather, they were to make us feel that all is marvellous, all wonderful, all pervaded with a divine presence, and that the simplest occurrences of life are miracles.

In conclusion. Let me address those who, like this sufferer, are in any degree conscious either of the natural or moral results of sin working in them. It is apparently a proud and a vain thing for a minister of Christ, himself tainted with sin, feeling, himself, perhaps, more than anyone else can feel, the misery of a palsied heart, for such a one to give advice to his brother-men; but it must be done, for he

is but the mouthpiece of truths greater than himself, truths which are facts, whether he can feel them all or not.

Therefore, if there be one among us, who, in the central depths of his soul, is conscious of a voice pronouncing the past accursed, the present awful, and the future terrible, I say to him, Lose no time in disputing, as these Scribes did, some Church question, "whether the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins," nor whether ecclesiastical etiquette permits you to approach God in this way or in that way, a question as impertinent as it would have been for the palsied man to debate whether social propriety permitted him to approach the Saviour as he did, instead of through the door.

My Christian brethren, if the crowd of difficulties which stand between your soul and God succeed in keeping you away, all is lost. Right into the presence you must force your way, with no concealment, baring the soul with all its ailments before Him, asking, not the arrest of the consequences of sin, but the "cleansing of the conscience from dead works to serve the

living God," so that if you must suffer you shall suffer as a forgiven man.

This is the time! Wait not for another opportunity nor for different means, for the saying of our Lord is ever fulfilled, "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force."

REST.

“Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls.” — *Matt. xi. 28, 29.*

NO one, perhaps, ever read these words of Christ without being struck with their singular adaptation to the necessities of our nature. We have read them again and again, and we have found them ever fresh, beautiful, and new. No man could ever read them without being conscious that they realized the very deepest and inmost want of his being. We feel it is a convincing proof of His divine mission that He has thus struck the key-note of our nature, in offering us rest.

Ancient systems were busy in the pursuit after happiness. Our modern systems of philosophy, science, — ay, even of theology, — oc-

cupy themselves with the same thought, telling us alike that "happiness is our being's end and aim." But it is not so that the Redeemer teaches. His doctrine is in words such as these: "In the world ye shall have," — not happiness, but "tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world"; "In me ye shall have peace." Not happiness,— the outward well-being so called in the world, but the inward rest which cometh from above. And He alone who made this promise had a right to say, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart; and ye shall find rest unto your souls." He had that rest in himself, and therefore could impart it; but it is often offered by men who have it not themselves. There are some, high professors of religion, too, who have never known this real rest, and who at fifty, sixty, seventy years of age, are as much slaves of the world as when they began, desiring still the honors, the riches, or the pleasures it has to give, and utterly neglecting the life which is to come.

When we turn to the history of Christ we find this repose characterizing his whole existence. For example, first, in the marriage-feast at Cana, in Galilee. He looked not upon that festivity with cynical asperity; he frowned not upon the innocent joys of life: he made the wine to give enjoyment, and yet singularly contrasted was his human and his divine joy. His mother came to him, full of consternation, and said, "They have no wine"; and the Redeemer, with calm self-possession, replied, "Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come." He felt not the deficiency which he supplied.

We pass from the marriage-feast to the scene of grief at Bethany, and still there we find that singular repose. Those words which we have seen to possess an almost magical charm in soothing the grief of mourners congregated round the coffin of the dead, "I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die," — speak they not of repose? But in the

requirements of these great matters many men are not found wanting; it is when we come to the domesticities of their existence that we see fretting anxiety comes upon their soul. Therefore it is that we gladly turn to that home at Bethany where he had gone for quiet rest. Let us hear his words on the subject of every-day cares: "Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things; but one thing is needful."

We pass on from that to the state in which a man is tried the most; and if ever we can pardon words of restlessness and petulance, it is when friends are unfaithful. Yet even here there is perfect calmness. Looking steadfastly into the future, He says, "Do ye now believe? Behold, the hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye shall be scattered, every man to his own, and shall leave me alone: and yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me."

Once more, we turn to the Redeemer's prayers. They are characterized by a calmness singularly contrasted with the vehemence which we sometimes see endeavoring to lash itself into

a greater fervor of devotion. The model prayer has no eloquence in it; it is calm, simple, full of repose.

We find this again in the seventeenth chapter of St. John. If a man feels himself artificial and worldly, if a man feels restless, we would recommend him to take up that chapter as his best cure. For at least one moment, as he read it, he would feel in his soul calmness and repose; it would seem almost as if he were listening to the grave and solemn words of a divine soliloquy. This was the mind of Him who gave this gracious promise, "Come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." We repeat these words as a matter of course; but I ask, Has that repose been found? has this peace come to us? For it is not by merely repeating them over and over again that we can enter into the deep rest of Christ.

Our subject this day will be to consider, in the first place, the false systems of rest which the world holds out, and to contrast them with the true rest of Christ. The first false system

proposed is the expectation of repose in the grave. When the spirit has parted from the body after long-protracted sufferings, we often hear it said that the release was a happy one; that there is a repose in the grave; that there the "wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest." Nay, at times, perhaps, we find ourselves hazarding a wish that our own particular current of existence had come to that point when it should mingle with the vast ocean of eternity.

There is in all this a kind of spurious pantheism, a sort of feeling that God is alike in every heart, that every man is to be blessed at last, that death is but a mere transition to a blessed sleep, that in the grave there is nothing but quiet, and that there is no misery beyond it. And yet one of the deepest thinkers of our nation suggests that there *may be* dreams even in the sleep of death. There is an illusion often in the way in which we think of death. The countenance, after the spirit has departed, is so strangely calm and meek that it produces the feeling of repose within us, and we transfer our

feelings to that of the departed spirit, and we fancy that body no longer convulsed with pain, those features so serene and full of peace, do but figure the rest which the spirit is enjoying; and yet, perhaps that soul, a few hours ago, was full of worldliness, full of pride, full of self-love. Think you that now that spirit is at rest, that it has entered into the rest of Christ? The repose that belongs to the grave is not even a rest of the atoms composing our material form.

There is another fallacious system of rest which would place it in the absence of outward trial. This is the world's peace. The world's peace ever consists in plans for the removal of outward trials. There lies at the bottom of all false systems of peace, the fallacy that if we can but produce a perfect set of circumstances, then we shall have the perfect man; if we remove temptation, we shall have a holy being; and so the world's rest comes to this, merely happiness and outward enjoyment. Ay, my Christian brethren, we carry these anticipations beyond the grave, and we think the heaven of God is but like the Mohammedan paradise, a

place in which the rain shall beat on us no longer, and the sun pour his burning rays upon us no more. Very often it is only a little less sensual, but quite as ignoble as that fabled by Mohammed.

The Redeemer throws all this aside at once as mere illusion. He teaches just the contrary. He says, "Not as the world giveth, give I unto you." The world proposes a rest by the removal of a burden. The Redeemer gives rest by giving us the spirit and power to bear the burden. "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, and ye shall find rest unto your souls." Christ does not promise a rest of inaction, neither that the thorns shall be converted into roses, nor that the trials of life shall be removed.

To the man who takes this yoke up in Christ's spirit, labor becomes blessedness, rest of soul and rest of body.

It matters not in what circumstances men are, whether high or low, never shall the rest of Christ be found in ease and self-gratification; never, throughout eternity, will there be rest

found in a life of freedom from duty. The paradise of the sluggard, where there is no exertion; the heaven of the coward, where there is no difficulty to be opposed, is not the rest of Christ. "Take my yoke upon you." Nay, more, if God could give us a heaven like that, it would be but misery; there can be no joy in indolent inaction. The curse on this world is labor; but to him who labors earnestly and truly it turns to blessedness. It is a curse only to him who tries to escape from the work allotted to him, who endeavors to make a compromise with duty. To him who takes Christ's yoke, not in a spirit of selfish ease and acquiescence in evil, but in strife and stern battle with it, the rest of Christ streams in upon his soul.

Many of us are drifting away from our moorings; we are quitting the old forms of thought, and faith, and life, and are seeking for something other than what satisfied the last generation; and this in a vain search for rest.

Many are the different systems of repose offered to us, and foremost is that proposed by the Church of Rome. Let us do her the

justice, at all events, to allow that she follows the Redeemer in this, it is not happiness she promises, she promises rest. The great strength of Romanism lies in this, that she professes to answer and satisfy the deep want of human nature for rest. She speaks of an infallibility on which she would persuade men, weary of the strain of doubt, to rest. It is not to the tales of miracles, and of the personal interference of God himself; but to the promise of an impossibility of error to those within her pale, that she owes her influence. And we say, better far to face doubt and perplexity manfully; to bear any yoke of Christ's than be content with the rest of a church's infallibility.

There is another error among many dissenters; in a different form we find the same promise held out. One says, that if we will but rely on God's promise of election our soul must find repose. Another system tells us that the penalty has fallen upon Christ, and that if we believe we shall no longer suffer. Narrowing their doctrines into one, as if all the want of the soul was to escape from punishment,

they place before us this doctrine, and say, believe that, and your soul shall find repose.

We have seen earnest men anxiously turning from view to view, and yet finding their souls as far from rest as ever. They remind us of the struggles of a man in fever, finding no rest, tossing from side to side, in vain seeking a cool spot on his pillow, and forgetting that the fever is within himself. And so it is with us; the unrest is within us; we foolishly expect to find that tranquillity in outward doctrine which alone can come from the calmness of the soul.

We will not deny that there is a *kind* of rest to be found in doctrine for a time; for instance, when a man, whose only idea of evil is its penalty, has received the consoling doctrine that there is no suffering for him to bear; but the unrest comes again. Doubtless, the Pharisees and Sadducees, when they went to the baptism of John, found something of repose there; but think you that they went back to their daily life with the rest of Christ? We expect some outward change will do that which nothing but the inward life can do; it is the life of

Christ within the soul which alone can give repose. There have been men in the Church of Rome and in the ranks of dissent who have indeed erred grievously, but yet have lived a life of godliness. There have been men in the true church, as Judas, who was a member of the true church, who yet, step by step, have formed in themselves the devil's nature; the rest of Christ pertains not to any one outward communion.

Before we go farther, let us understand what is meant by this rest; let us look to those symbols about us in the world of nature by which it is suggested. It is not the lake locked in ice that suggests repose, but the river moving on calmly and rapidly in silent majesty and strength. It is not the cattle lying in the sun, but the eagle cleaving the air with fixed pinions, that gives you the idea of repose combined with strength and motion. In creation, the rest of God is exhibited as a sense of power which nothing wearies. When chaos burst into harmony, so to speak, God had rest.

There are two deep principles in nature in ap-

parent contradiction, — one, the aspiration after perfection; the other, the longing after repose. In the harmony of these lies the rest of the soul of man. There have been times when we have experienced this; then the winds have been hushed, and the throb and the tumult of the passions have been blotted out of our bosoms. That was a moment when we were in harmony with all around, reconciled to ourselves and to our God; when we sympathized with all that was pure, all that was beautiful, all that was lovely.

This was not stagnation, it was fulness of life, — life in its most expanded form, such as nature witnessed in her first hour. This is life in that form of benevolence which expands into the mind of Christ. And when this is working in the soul, it is marvellous how it distils into a man's words and countenance. Strange and magical is the power of that collect wherein we pray to God, "Who alone can order the unruly wills and affections of sinful men, to grant unto his people that they may love the thing which he commands, and desire that which

he promises; that so among the sundry and manifold changes of the world, our hearts may surely there be fixed where true joys are to be found." There is a wondrous melody in that rhythm; the words are the echoes of the thought. The mind of the man who wrote them was in repose; all is ringing of rest. We do not wonder when Moses came down from the mount on which he had been bowing in adoration before the harmony of God, that his face was shining with a brightness too dazzling to look upon.

Our blessed Redeemer refers this rest to meekness and lowliness. There are three causes in men producing unrest: 1. Suspicion of God. 2. Inward discord. 3. Dissatisfaction with outward circumstances. For all these meekness is the cure. For the difficulty of understanding this world, the secret is in meekness. There is no mystery in God's dealings to the meek man, for "the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and he will show them his covenant"; there is no dread of God's judgments when our souls are meek.

The second cause of unrest is inward discord. We are going on in our selfishness. We stand, as Balaam stood, against the angel of the Lord, pressing on whilst the angel of love stands against us. Just as the dove, struggling against the storm, feeble and tired, is almost spent, until gradually, as if by inspiration, it has descended to the lower atmosphere, and so avoided the buffeting of the tempests above, and is then borne on by the wind of heaven in entire repose; like that is the rest of the soul. While we are unreconciled, the love of God stands against us, and, by his will, as long as man refuses to take up that yoke of his, he is full of discord; he is like the dove struggling with the elements aloft, as yet unconscious of the calm there is below. And you must make no compromise in taking up the burden of the Lord.

Lastly, unrest comes from dissatisfaction with outward circumstances. Part, perhaps the greater part, of our misery here comes from over-estimation of ourselves. We are slaves to vanity and pride. We think we are not in the right station; our genius has been misunder-

stood; we have been slighted, we have been passed by, we have not been rewarded as we ought to have been. So long as we have this false opinion of ourselves, it is impossible for us to realize true rest.

Sinners, in a world of love, encircling you round on every side, with blessings infinite upon infinite, and that again multiplied by infinity, God loves you; God fills you with enjoyment! Unjustly, unfairly treated in this world of love! Once let a man know for himself what God is, and then in that he will find peace. It will be the dawn of an everlasting day of calmness and serenity. I speak to some who have felt the darkness, the clouds, and the dreariness of life, whose affections have been blighted, who feel a discord and confusion in their being. To some to whom the world, lovely though it be, is such that they are obliged to say, "I see, I do not feel, how beautiful it is."

Brother men, there is rest in Christ, because he is love; because his are the everlasting verities of humanity. God does not cease to be the God of love because men are low, sad,

and desponding. In the performance of duty, in meekness, in trust in God, is our rest, our only rest. It is not in understanding a set of doctrines; not in an outward comprehension of the "scheme of salvation," that rest and peace are to be found, but in taking up, in all lowliness and meekness, the yoke of the Lord Jesus Christ.

"For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones."

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